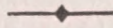






SOOLOOK, WILD BOY

By Roy J. Snell



LITTLE WHITE FOX AND HIS
ARCTIC FRIENDS

AN ESKIMO ROBINSON CRUSOE

CAPTAIN KITUK

SOOLOOK, WILD BOY



The action required at the moment was merely scrambling over crumbling mountains of ice toward a land in the distance. FRONTISPIECE. *Page 17.*

SOOLOOK

WILD BOY

BY
ROY J. ^{Judson} SNELL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL



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The action required at the moment
was merely scrambling over
crumbling mountains of ice to-
ward a land in the distance *Frontispiece* ✓

With aggressive snap and yelp, the
pack were attacking a lone beast . *Page 45* ✓

What roasts his haunches would
make! What a parka his sleek
coat! “ 86 ✓

Over and over they rolled, gripping
and struggling, deaf to the wild
screams of the raven “ 100 ✓

SOOLOOK, WILD BOY

CHAPTER I

HE IS NAMED WILD BOY

IN one quarter-circle sector of a snow house cowered an Eskimo boy. Perhaps he was ten, perhaps older. He sat there alone in desolation. Had his fur parka been removed, one might have counted his ribs, or laid a hand in the hollow of his sunken hips. He sat there half in sleep, half in stupor, as was the way of his people in starving time. No motion, no thought; this hoarded the marrow in their bones.

The snow igloo was dark. Only a seal-oil lamp, flickering out the last few drops of oil, set three shadows tottering and leaping on the wall. Two men and a woman occupied the opposite quarter-circle of the hut. They were holding a low, murmured conversation, and their council treated of the boy, of old men and of dogs.

The tribe was starving. No seal were to be found at the breathing holes. No walrus broke their way through the hard roof of the ocean; no white bear came prowling, and had one prowled who knows how the combat would have ended? Strong, well-fed men and dogs fight well, but these —?

In times of starving, the life of the tribe is at stake. Then the old, the young — those who neither hunt nor dress the meat — is it not well that they perish first? Is it not thus that the tribe lives longest? So reasoned the tall hunter, and the short hunter agreed; but the woman was undecided. Should they kill the boy? She did not know.

Already two forms lay out beneath the golden moon. The boy had seen them only a little time before. They were the figures of an old man and a child. Their white, sunken faces, framed by the whiter snow, had impressed him strangely. Yet he was too young to understand much of death.

But the woman wavered, undecided. At last came her decision; less cruel perhaps, and

perhaps more cruel it was than the plan of the men.

The snow door was removed and the boy thrust out. Then the door was closed again. The door was a soft thing of snow which could be broken in with one sturdy kick. Yet the boy did not kick it. In a strange, vague way, he realized that he had been thrust out to make his way among the dogs. If chance brought a fair wind with game, the dogs would be thrown a bone now and again. For were the dogs not necessary to the tribe? Without them meat could not be drawn long distances, and without them the tribe would be no match for gaunt white bears. Then, too, the dogs had ways of finding food. The sturdiest of them made long trips to the tundra, there to surprise a snowshoe rabbit or a ptarmigan.

All these things the boy sensed in a dim fashion. He now moved away from the igloo to the door of another, — the fourth to the right. Here, in a circle, sat twelve dogs. A single seal had been captured that day, and the greater part would be eaten in

that igloo. The dogs awaited bones and gristle. The boy took his place in the group, squatting there as they squatted. A sort of grin passed slowly around the circle, — a dog smile that seemed to say, “His skin is tender, his bones are soft.”

Suddenly an arm was thrust from the igloo and a bone dropped in the center of the ring. Instantly there was the chop-chop of jaws, and the lolling of tongues, yet not a dog moved. The bone would go to the strongest. But who was the strongest? That had not been determined. In days of plenty, the master of the pack is known, but “time makes cowards of us all”, and so does hunger. What dog could know that his failing, flickering spark of life was brighter than his neighbor’s? If one tried it would bring on a battle, — a battle between two, while the circle watched in grinning eagerness. For the law of the primitive had long since determined that the vanquished should be food for the pack. Oh, yes, his bones should crack!

In time one of the dogs would have dared his strength against any adversary, but the

boy, knowing the rich, sweet marrow in that bone and feeling the gnawing hunger in his very soul, moved first.

Then, like a dark shadow, a black demon of a dog sprang full upon him, sending him crashing upon the ice. But the boy was of the wild. He was at once upon his knees. A copper-pointed knife, a gift from an old man, shone above his head.

The black demon rushed again. He was slashed, but with his terrible fangs he slashed in turn. The boy's parka was torn, his shoulder crimson with blood. But the blade was copper-crimson, too. The dog had felt and paused to shiver before he rushed again. Yet his rush this time was more fiercely determined. The boy crashed to the ice. His knife clattered beyond his reach, and there it glimmered in the tantalizing moonlight.

The circle moved closer. Jaws chop-chopped, and tongues licked rapidly. Now the dog had broken the feeble grip upon his hairy coat and his muzzle touched the boy's throat.

But in that second some strange commotion stirred the atoms beneath the hard skull of a

gray fury of a dog. And in that instant he sprang.

In one wild spasm of action the boy was now on his knees, now standing, now again crouching in the circle. The battle had changed. But beneath his parka, cunningly concealed, was the seal bone.

The battle, then, was one as of old and described by a hundred pens, — a battle between two dogs of the pack. There is need here only to tell that the Gray Fury won, and when the pack at last slunk away their number was eleven, unless, perhaps, one were to count the boy, who, having cracked the seal bone and eaten its marrow, journeyed with them.

A blizzard had come howling down from the north. Blotting out the moon, turning the world into a whirling sheet of white, it cut and slashed at man and beast. Gray Fury, the wild boy's friend and defender, seeking the lee of a bank of snow, curled himself into a ball and lay quite still, while the snow drifted over him. The coat of the boy was quite as warm as that of the dog. Creeping close, he curled up beside the dog. This action was

met by neither encouragement nor rebuff. Soon the snow had buried them both. Not a sound came from them, not a move was seen, save now and then a circling sweep of arm or paw clearing the snow from nostrils and leaving place for the passing breath. They slept till the storm had passed, until the moon began once more her ceaseless circling, and the stars burned cold in the colder blue of the sky. Then only two wavering strings of white vapor told that here two creatures of the wild breathed and slept.

The boy awoke to a new world. Always of the wild, as were all his people, he was now one more point removed from that upward climb to the high pinnacle where man calls himself "civilized." He was a member of a pack. And, as days sped by, he won recognition from the pack. With the Gray Fury as his constant ally, with his arm growing stronger and surer at wielding the knife, he won both fear and respect.

At times old paths in his brain led him to doors of igloos, but there he paused, startled and surprised, only to return hurriedly to his

place in the waiting circle, or in the racing horde of wild creatures. The famine had not ended, and death still lurked in the snow huts. The pack was reduced to nine, including the wild boy, but these ranged in ever widening circles, caring less and less for the marrowless bones that were thrown to them by hands palsied from hunger.

As the days passed, the boy took on more of the ways of the pack. He learned the long, easy lope of his companions. Then, too, after they had cracked the bones of some snowshoe rabbit or Arctic hare and were feeling strong, he and Gray Fury would fight sham battles, — battles after the fashion of the pack. There would be the crashing of shoulder on shoulder, followed by the feigned cutting and slashing of knife and fangs. After that they would sit and smile at one another with lolling tongues till the battle began again. At times the dog conquered, and his fangs closed playfully on the windpipe of the boy; then again the boy conquered, and with hands gripping the dog's forelegs, he jammed his head down under the dog's lolling jaws and

set his teeth gently where any other member of the pack would gladly have sets his fangs with a grip of death.

So he learned the ways and wiles of battle as the pack knew it, and with food more plentiful than it had been at the time he was forced out to fight or perish, he led the pack farther afield until the igloos on the ice packs came to be little more than a memory.

But one day all this changed. While the pack slept beneath the snow of a blizzard, the survivors of the tribe, having secured food and grown strong again, came to rout the dogs from the snow, and with many a kick and blow dragged them away to toil in the harness. They urged the boy to return with them, promising that, since he had survived, they would make of him a great hunter. But he, surprised, disheartened, irresolute, stood alone until the last of them had been hid by the snow fog; then, behind a cut bank, sheltered from the storm, he sat down and, with head bent forward, slept.

He awoke hungry and alone. Gray Fury was many miles away. He could not count

upon him to find food. He must find it for himself. With this thought urging him on, the boy ascended the hill and scoured the horizon. In yonder broad stretch of tundra a hare might be hiding; or, if worse came to worse, he might at least capture a sleeping white owl. To the tundra he traveled, and there he found the fresh track of a snowshoe rabbit. His heart beat high with hope. But he had not gone far before the creature leaped high in air, then bounded lightly on before him. With patience born of the wild the boy followed. Again and again the rabbit leaped from his resting-place and sprang away, casting a fleeting blue shadow as he ran.

But now a third creature took up the trail. He was like Gray Fury, only his tail was more bushy, his coat whiter, his springing leap higher and wider. He followed the rabbit and the boy. And time lent him courage. He was near the boy as he crept slyly forward toward the resting rabbit, when something caused the boy to look around.

This sudden action sent the wolf bounding

backward. Instinctively the boy felt for his knife. It was gone! For a second his heart stopped beating, then went racing. He was alone on the tundra, empty-handed. Yet he did not rise and flee; he remained on hands and knees, looking at the wolf. When the wolf circled as if to outflank him, he turned, still facing him. And as he turned there came to him the memory of his sham battles with Gray Fury. He had won many of these battles, quite half of them, and Gray Fury was twice the size of this stranger. But who knew what strength and prowess this wild thing possessed? The rabbit, bounding from the grass, went loping away. He was followed by neither boy nor wolf.

The wolf, having scented his prey, showed instinctive race-fear of the man child; yet he was hungry, and the realization that this human was small and that he carried no long, stinging terrors with him, seemed, moment by moment, to give the creature courage. For now he pressed in closer. Cracking his teeth and sucking in his lolling tongue, he now and again sprang nimbly forward, to

snap and retreat. But the boy was nimble too. His feet were never there when the wolf snapped; his face—grim, smiling, determined—had turned that way.

For hours they parleyed. But at last, wearied, the wolf made a sudden sally, ripping the parka from the boy's shoulder but not tearing the flesh. For a second he felt a strange grip on a foreleg, then tore away. After that, for some time, he sat staring at the boy. But when he rose he made a fiercer attack, tearing at the boy's shoulder. This time the grip on his leg was stronger, surer. He was thrown on his back, but again, with a snarl and a strain, he escaped. And now, thoroughly angered and driven frantic by the smell of blood, he rushed in madly. For an instant his fangs tore flesh; but in that instant the boy's hands found their mark. Gripping the wolf by both forelegs, well up from the knees, he wrenched at them with all his strength till the snarling jaws loosed their hold. Then with a move quick as the ptarmigan's flight, he forced his head beneath the beast's lower jaw and set his

teeth on its throat, "where life bubbled near the surface."

Here the game had ended in all sham battles with Gray Fury. In this battle with the wolf there was no truce. The wolf, strangling, throbbing, shivering with rage and fear, with his strong hind legs tore at the boy's parka and his tender flesh. Soon the parka was in shreds, the skin lacerated and bleeding. But with grim determination the boy kept his teeth set until with a final shudder the wild creature straightened in death.

For a few moments the exhausted boy lay beside his quarry ; then, rising, he sought soft, dry moss to stop the flow of blood from his wounds. This done, he sat beside the one-time fierce creature that had sought his life. Dimly there came to him the realization that he had performed a remarkable feat. He had killed a white wolf single-handed and without weapons. In all the strange tales told by camp fires, in all the songs sung, no such feat as this had been recounted. And at thought of this, there came to him a human desire not of the wild. He wished to boast of his

prowess. And to whom could he boast save to other humans?

Having torn the wolf's tongue from between his jaws, he allowed it to lie on the snow until it froze, then he ate it. After that, gripping the hind legs of the creature, he threw it across his back.

It was a long, hard journey back, but finally the boy came within sight of the white-domed igloos that shone in the moonlight. He was soon among his admiring fellows. He was congratulated by the men, while the women rubbed his wounds with fresh seal oil and dressed him in a splendid new parka of spotted fawn skin.

That night he crept beneath the deerskin covers under the soot-blackened roof of the igloo. But, though he gazed long at the blackness, he could not sleep. Omnok, the short hunter, lay next to him, and the warmth of his flesh was irritating. Atatak, the woman, snored as she slept. The igloo was close and stuffy. Outside sounded the night wail of a dog. He recognized the call of Gray Fury. Silently slipping from the bed-shelf,

he drew on his duck-skin shirt and his parka ; then he crept through the door and closed it. The wind was blowing the snow about, but he sought out the dog, Gray Fury. The boy was at once set upon, and a sham battle followed ; after which the two curled up, as on that first night, to sleep beneath the snow. The passing of the storm left the moon to discover two wavering strings of steam rising where they slept.

After that the tribesmen spoke of him as "The one who sleeps with the pack ; he who slew a wolf unarmed and single-handed : Wild Boy."

CHAPTER II

HE MEETS A STRANGE MONSTER

OUT on the dark waters of the far, northern sea floated a strange house boat, — a house of snow on a raft of ice.

Before the opening to the house sat a solitary Eskimo boy of seventeen. His head drooped far forward, his arms folded across his seal-skin pook-sack, he slept. It was "Soolook", Wild Boy.

Does one will to travel thus in this land? Hardly. The current carries the voyager where it wills when he travels so. The swift waters of Union Straits, aided by the "Tide-Crack Spirit", had torn up the ice floe while the boy slept, snug in his snow house. And when he had awakened, here he was. He had surveyed the dark waters for a time, then, dragging his single deerskin outside, he had dropped down upon it and slept.

There had been nothing to do. Had he

not been of the wild, he would perhaps have fussed and fumed and lost sleep, and so lessened his chance for life. Being of the wild, he folded his arms across his pook-sack and slept. How long he slept thus he will not know or care; long periods of labor and long hours of sleep are usual with the Eskimo.

He awoke at last with a start. There had come a sudden jar, and blocks from the shattered snow house came thumping down on his head. In an instant he was alert — pook-sack on his back, copper-pointed lance and leather-strung harpoon in hand — ready for action.

The action required at the moment was merely scrambling over crumbling mountains of ice toward a land in the distance. To one of the wild this was child's play.

Reaching the land, he scanned it up and down. It was a new land, quite strange to him, for the current had carried him far. But to these Eskimos of the Far North, strange lands have no terror. Did not this boy, Soolook, travel far in winter over the ocean's ice, and farther still in summer by the

great Coppermine River and Dismal Lake? What cared he for strange lands?

Rubbing his eyes to drive away the drowsiness, he stood thinking. It occurred to him that he was hungry.

On the beach he found the wings of a dead sea gull. From the quills of these wings he stripped the tough outer fiber and soon had it cunningly tied into a twelve-foot line. He then walked out on the solid ice which adjoined the shore. Here, with his lance, he pecked steadily at the six-foot-thick ice till the dark water rose to meet him.

Smoothing off the edge of the hole, he drew from his pocket a bit of ivory into which had been set a piece of copper, curved and double-pointed. With some bright red seeds for bait, and the sea-gull affair for a line, he began to fish. For half an hour he bobbed the line patiently, without results.

“Peele-uk-tuk” (gone), he murmured, as he threw his line on the ice.

He dropped flat on his stomach and peered into the dark hole for about five minutes. Then, grasping his harpoon, he lowered it with

a sudden jab. When he drew it out, a flapping, dripping flounder hung to it. The fish was thin as a leaf and no larger than his hand, but several of them would make a meal. He threw it on the ice and tried again. In an hour he had ten, — quite enough. He ate them frozen, raw, with a crunching relish. After he had finished his meal he turned toward shore, bent on exploring the country.

No land could have been more desolate. Cold, barren ridges, where not a shrub sprang from the earth, were topped with whitecaps of snow. The beach, which would soon be sandy, was still buried in snow. A few dove-kies, the first harbingers of Arctic spring, soared about the cliffs, or sat in solemn twos and threes on the rocky edges. These birds appeared to be the only bit of animal life on the island. Knowing that he must remain here until the ice had locked the island to the mainland, he hastened on to drive away his loneliness. Rounding a cliff, he discovered a sheltering ledge which offered protection from storms. The abundant nesting places of wild fowl told him he was not to want for food.

“If only I was not so terribly alone!” he murmured to himself.

Then, stopping suddenly, he dropped on to his knees. Before him in a freshly melted snowbank were the tracks of some animal. They were too large for a fox. Was it a wolf or dog? For a moment his heart beat high with hope. If only he had a dog! A dog! As he thought of it, he realized how much these faithful creatures mean to his people. They moved the camp kits over the ice, dragged in the meat, and bravely attacked the great white bear. They starved patiently with their masters, and with them faced death in the blizzards. And what companions they were about the camp fires! If these tracks were only those of some dog who had deserted a cruel master and taken to living in this strange land! But his hopes fell. If it were a wild dog, was he not as much to be feared as a wolf? And what if it were a wolf, — if there were several wolves?

That night he slept as he had on the ice raft, his head drooping, his hands crossed over his lance and harpoon. His back was

to the cliff, and before him smoldered a fire of driftwood.

Once, half-awake, as in a dream, he seemed to see two fiery red dots gleaming where the cliff cast dark shadows. But when he was fully awake they had gone.

The next day, after climbing high on the cliffs for birds' eggs, he walked a long way on the beach. He came, at last, upon the frozen carcass of a great dead whale. Here he made sure that there were many creatures on the island. Foxes, with their small teeth, had gnawed low; higher up, dogs or wolves had torn at the meat and blubber. How many there were he could not tell, but not one or two of them could eat that which had recently been torn away from the carcass. But strangest of all, far above where these creatures could reach, great holes had been eaten in the whale. When the boy examined these holes closely, he realized that they could not have been made by a white bear, for the teeth that had left marks in the frozen meat were too pointed. What could it be? No creature such as this had ever crossed his path before. As he

searched along the cliffs, he came upon strange tracks in the snow. It could not be a polar bear. The polar bear's claws are mere hard, horny toes, blunt and harmless; but this creature's claws tore gashes two inches long in the hard-crusted snow. And he was immense! The boy knew this when he came upon a side of the cliff where the beast had stretched himself to a great height and clawed at the soft rock, as if to inscribe his name there.

The boy walked slowly back to his cliff, deep in thought. He was not alone on the island, but he had no companion. If only he had a dog! While he was thinking this, his eye caught sight of a moving object on the hill above him. Creeping slowly forward, then springing to his feet, he caught a glimpse of two sharp-pointed ears and two shining eyes.

"Camoogon!" (dog) he whispered excitedly, racing to the top of the ridge. But when he reached the crest, the creature had vanished; and search as he might, he found no further trace of it.

That night, before he slept, he gathered

much driftwood for his fire and dragging some great ribs of a whale close to the fire, he built a sort of barricade around it. Then he sat down to sleep, as the night before, with hands crossed over his weapons. But his sleep was troubled with dreams: now he chased wild, fleeting things over the hills; now they turned and pursued him; and now he battled with some great monster whose claws were as blades of hunting knives. At the end of these nightmares he would awake with a start and stare about him, then throw more wood on the fire and fall asleep again.

Days followed, wonderful days of spring, when all the air was full of bird life, when the ice melted and little white rivers of water were everywhere. The boy reveled in all this and feasted on eggs and wild ducks, caught with his bolas balls. But never did he cease to think of the four-footed creatures that inhabited his island. Never did he sleep without his hands crossed on his lance and a fire burning before him.

One day, as he climbed high on the cliffs for eggs, strange sounds came to him from

over the top of the ridge; sounds as of the noise of battle, — such a battle as he had often witnessed between a great white bear and a pack of dogs. Dashing down the cliff, at infinite danger of being crashed to the earth below, he seized his lance and tore up the slope from which the sound had come. When he arrived there, all was silence. The battle was over, if battle there had been. At first he thought he had heard only the moaning of the wind, but of a sudden his ear caught a low whine. Searching among the rocks, his heart gave a sudden bound of joy; there on the ground lay a wounded dog. She was terribly torn, but still alive. Could he save her? She did not snap at him, as he put out his hand. She was too near dead from loss of blood.

Hastily searching out clean bunches of moss, fine and dry as cobwebs, the boy covered her wounds to stop the bleeding; then carefully lifting her, he carried her down to his den behind the whalebone barrier.

Three days she lingered between life and death; then she licked his hand and whined

for food. She would live. At that his heart gave a great bound, for he was to have a companion.

But where were the other dogs of the pack? Now he had one, he longed for more, for a team. How much safer would be his journey home over the winter's ice if he had but a dog team and sled! But there his hopes fell. He had no sled; and, with no tools, how could he make one? He had killed two seals, and their skins would make harnesses, but a sled?

When his dog had fully recovered, when she had eaten and slept to eat and sleep again, when her eyes grew bright, her coat sleek, and her tail curly, he took her for a stroll over the hills. All at once she gave a strange whine and disappeared over the ridge. What could this mean? Was she deserting him so soon? Had she returned to the wild? For a long time he lingered on the hillside, but when the twilight fell he hurried to his den to cook his eggs in the hot ashes of a burned-out fire.

He was just thinking of sleep and feeling more keenly than ever the loneliness of the

place, when, hearing a shuffle on the sand, he turned to see his dog returning, and behind her, with lagging step and hanging tail, came a half-grown pup. As he came close, it was quite evident that he had been most soundly beaten by this older dog and compelled to follow. The boy's heart gave a great bound; not only had his friend returned, but she had brought a companion. Now, if only he had a sled!

In the weeks that followed, this little drama of dog land was repeated three times, and three more dogs were added to the boy's pack. Five dogs! What a famous team. With much pains and some suffering from bites and scratches, he broke them to drive, and then dragged great quantities of whale meat near his den.

But in all this he never forgot the great and terrible creature who made marks on the cliffs, high above the boy's head, who had whipped a pack of five dogs, and left their leader to die. Always he slept with his dogs grouped about the fire and with his hands crossed over his lance.

There came a time when he almost feared to sleep. The nights had stretched on and on till the day was scarcely four hours long. The sea was being blocked with ice, and already a thin snow veiled the island. Soon the ocean would be solidly covered, and he could leave his island of exile. But just at this time he discovered the broad tracks of the gigantic terror not ten harpoon lengths from his den. He had carried away a great piece of whale meat. With much labor, the boy had secured five seals. These he had hung over the whale ribs to freeze, as he intended to take them on his journey. But now the monster had found the whale meat, would he not carry away the seal meat, too, and would he be satisfied with that?

With these thoughts running through his mind, the boy made a long journey up the beach. He was on a ridge quite unknown to him, when he uttered a sudden, low exclamation. He had come upon the bones of a man. They lay unbroken and undisturbed, as if he had fallen asleep there. Some wandering tribe had built their snow igloos near this

shore ; this man had died, and his companions had carried him to this lonely ridge. At once the boy was on his knees searching among the rocks near the bones. With cries of joy he seized first a copper axe and then a chisel. His people buried a man's possessions with him. One might not steal from the dead, but one could borrow. Now he could have a sled.

Two short days and many long hours in the moonlight he labored on the sled, — shaping runners, smoothing braces, binding all with rawhide rope ; he worked till the thing was finished. Then, exhausted, he curled up on his deerskin and slept, — slept as he had not for months, the dreamless sleep of one unconscious of all things about him.

And that night the monster came. In the shadowy moonlight he approached the whale meat. He smelled it, seemed about to tear away a piece of it, then, lifting his huge snout, he sniffed the air. He trotted to the whale-rib barricade and, rearing on his haunches, with great forelegs crossed over the top rib, he smelled the seal meat. Again he

seemed about to carry food away, but again he hesitated and sniffed the air. What he smelled was fresh, new, alive. Then he set one hind foot on the lowest whale rib. At that there came an angry snarl, and from near the fire a gray fury sprang at him. She snapped and cracked her teeth as she came. The great grinning beast paused, as if in surprise. Had he not killed this fierce little creature long ago?

But now his foot was on the second rib; one bound and he would be at them. But by this time the whole pack was aroused, and sleepily the boy rubbed his eyes. Then he sprang to his feet, lance in hand. The fight began. In wild rage the mother dog, leaping high against the barrier, tore at the monster paws. The creature, attempting to strike the dog a death blow, slipped from his position and fell with a roar. Before he could regain his footing, he felt a mighty thrust in his side, and over the barrier he saw a creature in brown fur and a glistening white face thrusting out a mighty arm of terror. He was stopped again and again.

But now he was up. Roaring with rage and pain, he charged the barrier. The face disappeared, but as he dashed up the ladder-like structure, he was met with a fierce prodding. Again he fell, but this time brought down the barricade with him. When he arose, nothing obstructed his way, nothing save five small creatures and one tall slim one, and before them something that was red like the sunset. He rushed straight on. But what was this?

As he crossed the red things, they seemed to rise up and bite him. With a roar of pain he fell flat upon them and rolled to crush the life from them. Every movement gave him a thousand pains. And now the whole furious pack was upon him. Finally he rolled from the fire, but at that instant the Eskimo boy's lance pierced his heart. The great silver-gray fury roared once and lay dead.

"Azeezruk! Ca?" (A bad one, is it not so?) murmured the boy, as he sank to the ground in exhaustion.

When he had rested, he skinned the animal and marveled at the wonderful thick fur,

unlike any kind he had ever seen before. With joy in his heart, he fastened the skin on his sled and, with seal meat sufficient for a long journey, he hastened away through the perpetual moonlight toward the snow igloos of his people.

And glory came to him when he reached his people after many days, for they marveled also at the beautiful skin and at the prowess of the boy who had killed this strange animal. "He is a great hunter," they said. "He has killed a great and strange beast like none we have ever seen."

Then one of the men came forward to examine the skin more closely with his failing eyes. He was bent and shriveled with his great age, for he was the oldest of them all. And the others made way for him and listened, for they knew he was very, very wise and remembered much of what had happened long ago. "Let us hear what the Wise One can tell us of this strange thing," they said.

The old man bent over the fur for a moment and exclaimed in surprise. Then he told them: "It is the skin of the Great Bear!

Many, many years ago, I have seen an animal with fur like this. But so long ago it was that all men have thought that the children of the Great Bear no longer roamed in any lands. The boy is a great hunter, for he is the only one who has killed a Great Bear since long ago."

And he marveled much, as he rubbed the thick fur of the great, barren-ground grizzly.

CHAPTER III

THE OO-MING-MUCK-SUIT

FOR three whole days after his return to the tribe from the barren lands of the North, Soolook sat in the igloo. Staring dreamily at the seal-oil lamp, he would now and then start and half rise, only to sink back to his place on the deerskin. He was like one who moves in a dream.

The thoughts that ran through his mind were of a varied nature. He was now a hero. When but a small boy he had slain a wolf unarmed and unaided. Now he had returned from an exploit not less extraordinary. He had slain the strange monster, known to only one member of his tribe, and he an old man bent with years. He had gone away alone; he had returned with a dog-team, harnessed to a sled. Yes, he was a hero. The dusky maidens of his people would smile upon

him. He might, if he chose, challenge the strong youths of the tribe to meet him in trial of strength for the heart and hand of the fairest. And he would win; for had not his battles with wild things taught him a cunning that no other knew?

But Soolook was still young. He thought more of adventure than of anything else. Two great mysteries, the solution of which offered two great adventures, held first place in his busy mind and goaded his restless soul. There was the Oo-ming-muck-suit and there was the Kabluna. Long he pondered over the tales which he remembered to have heard of the Kabluna. The Kabluna were a people, so the stories ran, who lived far, far toward the land of the rising sun and quite as far toward the land of the setting sun. Also, they were thought to live in the land whence the wild duck and the caribou came in the springtime. Great and terrible was a Kabluna. Standing three times the height of the tallest Eskimo, he stalked over the land with giant strides. With a hollow weapon, black and terrible, he killed at a distance with

a magic of great noises. As for the appearance of this terrible tribesman, his face was very white, except where it was covered with a beard like the willow brush in winter. And in the midst of his snow-white forehead burned a fiery eye, which turned this way and that, seeing all things.

Three days Soolook sat on the deerskins and gazed at the light of the seal-oil lamp. At the end of the third day, he rose and sharpened his lance on a sandstone rock. Then, calling to his most trusted dog, he threw a sealskin pook-sack filled with dried meat and a bladder full of seal oil across his back, and walked out into the moonlight.

A few days later a wild, autumn blizzard swept the ocean ice. Here, around up-ended ice cakes, it sent whirling jetties; here set the tops of giant ice piles smoking like live volcanoes, and here swept an ice pan clean as a skating-rink. Hidden away in a niche between ice cakes were two brown spots, a boy and a dog, — Soolook and his dog.

Soolook sat in his accustomed position when asleep, with head drooped forward, nearly

touching his outstretched arms, which were crossed at the wrists over the two wooden shafts of his harpoon and lance. Beneath these lay a sealskin pook-sack.

All unconscious of the blizzard, the boy slept, and beside him lay his dog. All unconscious of the blizzard they were, but not insensible to everything; they slept with ears awake.

Now, by a distant ice pile some white thing stirred and crept toward them, — a gaunt white wolf of the Arctic wilderness which cracked his teeth together as he came.

He had only just reached a protruding ice cake when there came a roar and a dash from the dog. The boy was awake at once, with hand gripping the copper-pointed lance. The wolf faded silently into the blizzard. The dog returned; the boy slept.

The boy's position would have been impossible to a white man; but to him, to Soolook, who was of the primitive, whose backbone was as limber as a fresh-cut, rawhide rope; who could spring forward and kick with both feet higher in the air than a man's head, to

him it was a position of both rest and alertness.

The wolf was not alone in his vigil. There were ten in the pack. Three days they had followed Soolook. It was their way of hunting. Sooner or later he would become exhausted and sleep too long, or, starved to a shadow, he would fall ill, and then they would eat him. Had he been with companions they would not have troubled to stalk him, but alone he seemed a safe prey. Now and again they ran down a snowshoe rabbit, or stalked a sleeping seal, but they never lost sight of the boy and the dog. Already in their fiery eyes they saw him fall; already their teeth tore his tender flesh. But the boy, unconscious of all, save unwonted sounds, slept on.

The sun, a gray ball of light rolling through the dun darkness of snow-fog, was two hours high when at last he stretched his arms, and, smiling, looked at his dog. The dog rose and licked his hand.

From the boy's pook-sack hung a horn. It was very broad at the base and came quite abruptly to a point. The old hard scales

had been scraped from it. It had been polished to glistening perfection. The edge had been cunningly set with bits of walrus ivory.

“Oo-ming-muck-suit,” he murmured, touching the horn. He had never hunted the Oo-ming-muck-suit; his people never had. The horn had been traded for by his ancestors before the time when the Ting-ma-ni-muits of the far east, “they who have no chins”, had become wicked murderers. But now, for generations, the Oo-ming-muck-suit had been unknown to his people. And with the passing of years strange, weird tales had been told of his nature. He bellowed like the north wind; he was ten times the size of a caribou; he tore men as a wolf tears a rabbit. No arrow could pierce his skin; he could be killed only by a blow between the horns. Such were the descriptions given to the boy, Soolook. And many were the weird, wild tales told around the camp fire. Surely, he was the greatest of hunted creatures, stronger and more terrible than the white bear, fleetier than the caribou, more patient than the white wolf. He was to be dreaded and praised.

“Why did they not go to hunt him?” The boy had often asked, and the reply had always been, “Why hunt the most terrible, when there are less terrible creatures to hunt? Besides, there is danger that we meet the tribe of the chinless ones and all be killed.”

But Soolook was young and brave. He would bring home new horns of the Oo-ming-muck-suit as a trophy and proof of his prowess.

A bite of dried caribou meat, a snail shell full of seal oil for boy and dog, and the march to the strange east land was resumed. The wolf-pack followed behind, or walked to the right and left of the pair. They took no chances. This was not a Kabluna, he of the white face who killed at a great distance with a magic of much noise, but this boy could cast his copper-pointed shaft with remarkable skill and strength, and the flight of his copper-pointed arrows was greatly to be feared. The pack was not in a hurry. Patience is born in the brain of every Arctic creature. So they followed on.

Three days passed as this one had, only the

bit of dried meat, the drop of seal oil to boy and dog grew less and less, and the footsteps of the boy grew less steady and determined. At midday he paused and sat down upon his pook-sack. The wolf-pack, becoming bolder, pressed in, caring little for the angry snarls of the dog. But the boy did not heed them. He was asleep, all but his eyes and the muscles of two fingers. The fingers were turned about the shaft of his harpoon, his eyes riveted on a small round hole in the ice. Hour after hour he sat there. The sun went down; a sunset lingered; the moon shone out. The wolf-pack crept closer. Snapping at one another and lolling their tongues at the boy, they sat around in a wide circle.

Suddenly the fingers gripped the shaft more tightly. There was a flash of the harpoon point in the moonlight.

Two hours later the wolves snapped and snarled over the bones of a brown seal which lay where the boy's patience had been rewarded. The boy and the dog slept as before, by a sheltering ice pillar, but they had been fed.

Next day, they reached a land where high, white-topped mountains smoked with snow. Straight away over the low hills they went, and now the boy's eyes were keenly alert. Every jutting rock, every bit of land where the snow was blown away held his attention for an instant. Sooner or later one of these spots would move, and he would know that he had come upon the master-prey, — the Oo-ming-muck-suit.

The wolves, too, were much more on the alert. Perhaps because they knew that here the boy could not find seal; perhaps because for them, too, the great Oo-ming-muck-suit was a prize. And, had it not been for the white wolf, the boy might never have found the object of his quest.

One night, as the boy slept, the dog gave a sudden, strange growl. Awaking, the boy grasped his lance. But what was this? The wolves had broken circle and, with tongues lolling, were dashing away. Mystified, the boy followed, and soon his heart was beating wildly, for back to back, with heads tossing, five dark creatures faced the snarling,

snapping pack. The dog whined to join the hunt, but the boy held him back. From the way of the wolf he would learn many things. The master-prey was not as large as he had expected him to be, but from the attitude of the wolf-pack, Soolook learned the Oo-ming-muck-suit was greatly to be feared.

Seated on a rock, with hands crossed over his weapons, the boy waited and watched. This was not to be a we-wait-your-weakness game. It was to be a snapping and a harrying, a rush-at-your-heels-if-you-break formation; a pitting of will against will. The weak of will would be the victim; separated from his companions he would fall.

But the great beasts were accustomed to such battles. Hour after hour they tossed great heads slowly up and down, to break at last up a hill and form again before fangs tore at their tendons.

Ever the boy followed the pack. To him these were no longer a pack of wolves, but of dogs — his dogs — doing his bidding. They would harry till the weakest of the Oo-ming-muck-suit fell to their lot, then he would be

in at the kill, for it would be he, Soolook, who would kill the great Oo-ming-muck-suit.

But as hours passed without end, and there was neither raw seal meat nor dried caribou meat left in the pook-sack the boy stumbled now and again, and his lids drooped in sleep, while the dog came on with trembling limbs and slept at every opportunity, — not the half sleep of watchfulness, but the dead sleep of starvation.

[Now the dog happened upon two lemmings beneath a rock. Upon the raw meat of these animals boy and dog feasted, crunching their tender bones. The food gave them new strength, and to the boy came vitality for plans and action. He could not wait. Something must be done, and at once. Carefully selecting two arrows, he tested his bow. Then with these and his lance, he crept up a narrow swale that ran close to where the wolves were harrying their prey. Pausing now and again, as if to gather strength, then creeping slowly forward, he drew close to the nearest wolf, who was sitting erect on his haunches. Silently rising to a sitting position, the boy

drew his bow. His hand trembled, but his aim was true. The wolf sprang forward, then fell howling in death agony. The boy was up like a flash, his lance gleaming above his head. He was not a moment too soon, for two wolves had dashed at their fallen brother. A thrust at one of these sent him howling away. The other paused. For an instant the eyes of the entire pack were upon the boy and the dead wolf. In this little drama was a critical moment. Would they attack? The boy was not their match. Only their individual cowardice could save him. But attack did not come. Finding themselves free, for the time being, the great Ooming-muck-suit lowered their heads, turned tail, and went snorting away. This was a signal for the whole pack to follow in full cry.

The boy sank weakly beside the dead wolf, and his dog dropped beside him. Here was food,—food that would give them strength to last them to the end. Searching among the mosses, the boy gathered creeping birch and willows. With these and fine mosses he



With aggressive snap and yelp, the pack were attacking a lone beast. *Page 45.*

made a fire. In a small soapstone pot he boiled bits of the meat, and to the broth of this he added blood caught in the horn of Oo-ming-muck-suit. This thick soup he drank slowly. The meat he gave to the dog. Then, throwing themselves on the mossy earth, they rested. The wolves and the Oo-ming-muck-suit were still in full view.

In two hours they ate again, this time less sparingly. Strength had come back to them. The boy no longer stumbled, nor did the dog's knees tremble; but the boy's eyes were heavy with sleep.

Moving along the valley's edge, they came once more near to the battle. Here the boy sat down, with back against a rock, shoulders bent, hands crossed, and without willing it, slept with every sense dead to all things.

How long he slept he could not tell, but when he awoke the scene was changed. With aggressive snap and yelp, the pack were attacking a lone beast, he of the weaker will.

With a cry the boy, seizing his bow and lance, threw himself into the fray. It was not enough that he secure the trophies; they must

be his by right of prowess; he must be in at the kill.

An arrow crashed into the nearest wolf. He went down with a whine. Another, turning, caught the lance in his thigh; a third, busied with nipping the great prey's tendons, felt a blow crash against his hips and turned to snarl at a copper-pointed fury which bound him to earth. The dog, entering the fray, gave battle to one. Then the remainder turned to the boy. But the boy had only one thought: the Oo-ming-muck-suit! He sent an arrow against its side. The weapon stuck there, its protruding length telling full well that it had not passed through the mat of hair. One tale was true, — no arrow would avail. The boy's heart sank. But, with a bold turn, he swung about to face the beast with the wolves in the rear. Poising his lance, he dashed it with full force between the beast's horns. With a roar of death in his throat, the creature fell, and wolves rushed upon him.

For a moment the boy tugged at his lance, but it would not loosen. Then with intrepid

spirit, he tore the arrows from the fallen wolves and sent them crashing into the ribs of the remaining foes. With a snarl, a single brave one sprang at him. He was met by the dog. Two wolves remained and but a single arrow. The arrow was adjusted with care, and it fulfilled its mission well.

Seeing that his last living friend was grappling with a fiend of a dog, the remaining wolf dropped his tail and ran.

Then the boy sank upon the body of the fallen Oo-ming-muck-suit and hid his face in his hands until his racing heart was stilled. He had won.

After long rest and sleep, the boy, having sharpened his copper-bladed knife, stripped the skin from the carcass of the great beast. Beneath the skin was rich, red meat. Some of this he broiled over a fire and found it to have a strange, musky flavor, such as he had never tasted before. There could be little wonder at this, for the Oo-ming-muck-suit was none other than the musk ox.

After eating of the meat and drinking of the blood-broth of his kill, the boy wrapped him-

self in the great skin, with the hair side within, and slept while a blizzard came and went.

Then he hacked the great twisted horns from the bony head, he fastened them with a thong across his shoulders, and turned his face toward the home of his tribe.

Six hours he had traveled over hills and tundra, when, stopping abruptly, his hands thrown up in amazement, he stared at the tracks of two men. The tracks, made since the coming of the blizzard, had crossed his path and disappeared up a hill. They were strange tracks. Where the heel sank into the snow it did not leave a ball-like depression, but cut a semicircle which was directly drawn across by a straight line. What manner of men wore such "mukluks" (native boots)? Surely, no tribes that had ever come in contact with his own.

Stealthily he followed the tracks to the brow of the hill. There he found the carcass of a young caribou from which a hind quarter had been cut by a blade much keener than those known to Soolook.

Glancing cautiously this way and that, he

at last bent over the carcass to determine, if possible, what manner of death the creature had met.

At length he straightened up with an exclamation :

“Matna ! Azeezruk Ka ?” (I say ! A bad one ! Is it not so ?)

He had discovered a tiny hole running quite through the hard skull of the caribou. No lance could have been thrown, no arrow shot with such force as that.

“Matna ! Kabluna !” he murmured.

He stood there in a brown study, his gaze resting first on the trail of the stranger, then shifting to the distant ice pans where his people hunted, ate and slept.

His dog had started a snowshoe rabbit and was bounding away after him. He circled the base of the hill, raced a long way down the gully, then, having lost his quarry in a pile of massive boulders, came racing back to his master. Still Soolook stood undecided.

Finally, bending over the carcass, he cut from the back a rich roast. Then he walked rapidly to the foot of a cliff where, in the lee

of the wind, he sat down. With his venison on a ledge of rock, well out of reach of prowlers, he folded his hands across his weapons, bowed his head forward and slept. True, he had slept not long before, but preceding that there had been long circles of the moon — many of them — when there was little sleep. To think well he must have his brain freshened by much rest.

CHAPTER IV

DUE NORTH

HAD Soolook known the nature of the two strangers who had crossed his path, he would doubtless have pressed forward without further delay. Had he known the perilous predicament the two men were in, he might even have hastened to their aid; for at that moment the mortal enemies of his people, Indians from the Land of Little Sticks, were imperiling the two strangers who had so lately appeared along his course.

The two men, at the very moment that Soolook sat him down to sleep, were peering through the thick, matted branches of a dwarf spruce forest at the glowing light of a camp fire. Around that camp fire moved a score or more of swarthy figures. These were the Indians from the Land of Little Sticks. The camp, a few hours before, had been their own.

Beyond the fire, in the branches of a spruce tree, was their skin kiak, a two-seated boat, made by the natives of the east coast of Alaska, and in it had been packed their supplies of food, spare garments, ammunition, traps and blankets.

But now their camp fire burned brightly for others, — a wild, savage horde. They had gone in search of caribou and had returned to find this situation. They had secured caribou meat, it is true, and it hung at that moment on a near-by branch. But other than this they had next to nothing; no blankets certainly, and the Arctic nights were long, with the temperature dropping to a point where only skins could defy it. They had two rifles, but only some twenty rounds of ammunition.

“Not enough for a successful attack,” groaned the younger of the two, a stout American boy of nineteen.

Having settled this question, he sat down to think, and whether he willed it or no, the events which had brought them to this strange place, so far from the haunts of civilization,

came trooping through his mind in regular procession.

In Nome they called this boy "Waste", because his shock of white hair always resembled a mass of the familiar engineer's waste. Waste had always lived with his father in Alaska. His mother had died when he was two. There were some things he knew a great deal about. One was prospecting; the other was Eskimos and Indians, though he had never learned the language of either.

Now to begin with, he remembered a conversation between himself and his present companion, Swen Petersen, who was a mature man of twenty-three, with a boy's heart when it came to matters of adventure. The conversation had taken place on the beach at Nome.

"Mouth of the MacKenzie." He had pointed to a spot on his well-thumbed map, then away at a gasoline schooner which lay off the beach. His gesture joined the two.

Swen had stared at the map. "Some trip, ain't it?" he had said.

"Yes, it 's a grand trip to the mouth, but

up the river and then up one of its branches, — say the Hare Indian River. Oh, boy! Some trip!”

“What! They ’re not going up there?” The young Norwegian’s face had registered surprise.

“No, but we are,” the boy had said. “You and I are; at least, if you ’re willing.” He had wrinkled his brow in a worried way. Then he had pulled his hair and stood staring at the map. He had been giving Swen’s ponderous mind time to swing around on its pivot.

“You see these spots marked ‘Unexplored’?” he had proceeded at last.

Swen had nodded.

“Well, it ’s one of those spots we ’d be on if we went up Hare Indian River. Just think about it. Unexplored!” He closed his eyes, as if to see it. “Father and I often talk about the ‘Unexplored.’ In winter the snow smokes from the peaks of the mountains and nobody sees it but the wolves and the caribou. In summer the snow runs away down the streams, willows grow leaves, flowers bloom,

and only the caribou know about the willows, for they eat the leaves; only the ptarmigan know about the blueberries, for they peck at them; only the little birds know about the sparkling streams, and if there is gold glimmering at the bottom, they are naturally not wise enough to tell it from sandstone pebbles. And there is gold in many a stream up there, if you only know where to find it."

Again he had paused to stare at the map. Now and again he had stolen a glance at his companion.

"You know I have always lived in Alaska," he had gone on, "and since I was ten have always gone prospecting in the spring with my father, of course. But now he's 'struck it' and does n't need to prospect. Besides, he's down in the States where I want to go too, but not just yet. It is spring again, and there's the shovels and pans rusting in the corner of our shack, begging to be shined up and taken out over the hills and the tundra. Say! I bet those shovels and pans have seen enough of the North to guide you anywhere, if they could talk. But they can't. And

you can't go prospecting without a partner who can talk."

"But how 'd we get back?" Swen had objected. "River 'd be blocked with ice and so would the ocean."

"Would n't come back," Waste ' had laughed, "we 'd keep right on going. We 'd travel in a skin kiak, which is light and easy to portage. When fall began to come on, we 'd pack up and begin going southeast. We 'd take lakes and rivers as we found them and follow the season south till we came at last to where steamcars were tooting down some narrow-gauge railroad track, and there we are, right 'outside' to spend the winter in comfort."

A week later Waste had felt his heart skip a beat as the gasoline schooner began to throb and shake, and the little city of Nome began to grow smaller and smaller, till the houses, stores and churches seemed a play city of pasteboard, pasted to a play beach and a papier-mâché hillside. They were off for the MacKenzie River and the great unexplored. Was it surprising that he had won-

dered, as he saw it fade, when he would see another city as large? Had he known what was in the future he would have trembled and perhaps turned back, but he did not know.

The trip up the coast and along the northern edge of the continent to the mouth of the river had been uneventful. Twice they had been halted by ice floes and compelled to make wide detours, but this was to be expected in waters of the Far North. The ice was but a few days gone from the river when they had arrived, but a side-wheel steamer had been waiting at the dock, so fortune gave them immediate transportation.

Having paid their way on this vessel, they had been free to sit on deck and watch the never-ending panorama of willow-grown banks, barren hills and snow-peaked mountains, which were finally hid by near-by foothills. Here and there they had passed trading posts with little native villages huddled about them. Now and again they had met canoe-loads of Indians returning from their winter's trapping. Now the steamer had dodged a belated ice cake, and now skirted some new

snag left in the wake of the ice. And all the time the sun had been shining. It had been spring; such a spring as only the Northland can know, — land of the long winter night and the long, long summer day.

One night, when the sun at midnight had made a vain attempt to hide itself below the horizon, and the boys were attempting to catch a little sleep, they had been awakened by a porter.

“Be at the mouth of Hare Indian in two hours,” he had grinned, giving them another shake.

They tumbled into their clothes, and threw their few belongings, not already packed, into the kiak; then, having unlashed it, they prepared to disembark.

Wonderful stretches of time had followed; they could hardly be called days, for the sun had been constantly shining. There had been hours on end when, without a word, the boys had plied their paddles. With silent strength they had sent the little craft shooting up the river, which held some new mystery beyond every bend. Now a caribou or a runaway

reindeer had stood belly-deep in the river for a moment to stare at them, then he'd waded ashore and gone crashing through the brush; now a beaver, swimming strongly with only his nose above the water, had cut a line across stream; now a wolf had howled at them, and now a great brown bear had grunted on shore. Always some creature of the wild, half-welcoming them, half-fearing, had crossed their path. Waste would not have been a boy had not his fingers involuntarily reached for his rifle at the sight of big game, but he would not have been the son of his father had he killed one of these creatures for sport or for one juicy meal and left the carcass to rot by the river's brink. There were fish in the stream, plenty of them; one needed but a bit of pork rind and a hook and line to catch them. Splendid speckled beauties they were, too! Then there were wild ducks and geese, flapping and screaming in every eddy. These they had picked off with a light rifle and broiled over a bed of coals. It had been one continuous camping trip. When hunger had called them, they had banked their kiak

and prepared a meal. When drowsy eyes had told them to sleep, they had crept beneath the dark shadows of fir trees and slept. There had been no danger of thieves, for they had long since passed the haunts of man.

But they had not forgotten the thing that had called to them, — gold. As the river had sped beneath them, they had seemed to see its yellow gleam. As they slept they had dreamed of it. At last the river had divided into many branches. They had chosen one of these and proceeded cautiously forward, watching the gravelly banks for signs of “color” and pausing here and there to throw a pick and pan on the bank to test the quality of the sand which was deposited there.

The stream had grown too narrow and swift for their craft, and they had gone ten miles up it on foot, when near the foot of a foaming rapids they had found it — “color in the pan” — not a great quantity, but enough to set their hearts thumping and to send them hastening away downstream to bring their kiak and their kit to this spot, ready for work after they had had a night’s rest.

The "lead" had turned out to be one of the tantalizing, illusive sort. Here they would come upon some sizable nuggets clinched in among the rocks, and here a few pans which were rich in "pay", but there would follow days of patient picking and panning, with scarcely the "color" in the pan to give them encouragement. Of one thing they had been sure: as they worked upstream their rewards increased.

One day, after weeks of this exertion, Waste had sat in the twilight and solemnly counted the knots in his string calendar. For every time the sun had dipped close to the horizon, he had tied a knot; for every time the sun had dipped beneath the horizon, when the days began to shorten, he had tied a knot, and for every short night they had slept those last days, he had tied a knot, so now he had only to count the knots to tell how many days and weeks had elapsed since they had left the mouth of Hare Indian River. This would tell him the date. He was startled when he had finished the reckoning. It was later than he had thought.

“When a fellow ’s after the gold, he forgets,” he had mumbled.

“Swen, we ’ve got to get out of here,” he had said suddenly, a few moments later, as he poised the leg of a duck, done to a turn, on his fork.

The expression which spread over Swen’s face had been a study. Surprise, disappointment, consternation had raced across it and left him staring.

“Why — why — no — we can’t do that,” he had stammered.

“Got to.”

“Wh — why?”

“Winter ’s coming.”

“Why, we could stay here all winter, if we need to, and mine. Could build a log shack and — and there ’s plenty of game.”

“Game enough in summer and easy caught. But not in winter. Ducks and geese are going south now. You can hear them taking farewell honks at this very moment. There ’d be fish, but you can’t live on fish alone. You ’d feel all right, but get weaker and weaker. There might be rabbits, but you ’ve heard the

Eskimo talk about 'starved on rabbit'; well, that would be our case. No, we gotta get going, sooner the better."

For a long time Swen had sat staring at the fire; at last he had spoken.

"'T ain't for me I'd ask you to do it, Waste; it's for my sister. I got a sister down in the States. She's seventeen, and she wants to go to school, same as you do. Now, the gold we'll get will give us a home. She can come to town and keep house while I earn the livin' money. You see how it is, Waste; 't ain't for me, it's for her. Just stick here. I know we'll strike it rich. Pretty soon, too; mebbby next week, mebbby to-morrow, mebbby the day after, and if we do we can get out yet, and if we don't we won't starve. The caribou'll be comin' down, and there's bears and all such things."

"I did n't know you had a sister. Why did n't you tell me about her before?" Waste had asked.

"Why, I did n't think you liked to talk about girls. You did n't ever talk to the natives."

“My father says God never intended for white men and native women to marry, but when it comes to white girls, — when it comes to having a sister! Why! That must be grand!” He had put out his hand for a solemn shake.

“But that’s just one more reason, and a big one, why I would n’t stay,” he had said the words slowly. “If you’ve got some one sort of depending on you, you’ve got no right to take chances. If a man’s got dependents, he’s bound to take good care of himself. He can’t go dragging himself into all kinds of danger, unless it’s necessary, and this ain’t. You can come back next summer. Mebby I can come with you. Anyway, there’s enough gold in our sack to keep your sister in school this winter; you can have my share if you need it. But out we go to-morrow with the rising sun. If I’d known it made so much difference, we’d have gone sooner.”

“All right,” Swen had said it reluctantly, as he had begun to unlace his shoes.

Their course, south and east, Waste had mapped out carefully. They were to go east

to a large lake, follow the southern shore of this to the east end, then make a long portage to the tributaries of a river. He did not know just where the tributaries were, for they were not marked on the map, but they would find one, and, once the stream was broad enough and deep enough to carry their kiak in safety, their journey "outside" was assured. He had smiled at the picture they would make, dressed in Arctic costume and riding a kiak into some town down there below.

All had gone well till they had reached the lake and skirted its border. Game was plentiful, and with their keen vigor they made good time. But they had hardly left the lake when misfortune had overtaken them. In crossing a turbulent little stream, Waste had crushed their only compass against a rock, and its needle splashed into the foam. To add to their discomforts a dense fog had settled down over everything. Soon they had become uncertain of their directions. But, with this ominous fog telling of the swift coming of winter, they had not dared to pause. The land they were in was less promising than

the region they had left, for here the forests had been burned over, and a sparse growth of timber and a grassless rocky soil had robbed the place of its game. Had it not been for the wild fowl, which had still lingered, they might have fared badly. Pushing blindly on, they had come at the end of the third day of fog to a sort of divide in the hills, and at the bottom of this ran a stream sufficiently large to float their kiak.

Waste had bitterly bemoaned his lack of knowledge of forestry. There were ways of telling directions in the forests, but he did not know them. His life had been passed on the tundra and in the barren mountains, where the stars and the snow on hillsides were a man's guides. Had they been less exhausted; had there been less danger of winter settling down upon them; had game been more plentiful, they might have loitered till the sun showed them the way. But as it was, they had set their kiak in the water and, leaping in, had trusted the stream to carry them to the land they sought.

For three days more the fog had hung low.

At times a fine mist had driven in their faces, chilling them to the marrow. Ever they had shot onward. Stream after stream had joined the course of their river until at last they had been riding a mighty current.

Then, suddenly, the sun had come out. It had been behind their backs and the hour must be about noon. Waste gave a cry of dismay.

“We ’re going north!”

“Oh! Ah!” Swen had groaned.

“Perhaps it’s just a bend in the river,” Waste had said hopefully.

But when they had traveled an hour in the same direction, this hope had died. A new one, not quite so bright, had come to take its place.

“Bet we ’ve struck another branch of the MacKenzie, and we’re in the river again,” Waste had said.

It would have been hard to tell whether Swen had been glad or sorry at this new solution. If they were in the MacKenzie, they ’d winter at the first trading post they came to, and that would give them an early start back to the mine in the spring. And

the mine! To Swen, that was the absorbing interest; that and after that, Freda.

They had traveled in this hope two days. Waste, who kept a keen watch on either shore, had begun to doubt the accuracy of the decision, when something happened which made him certain about it. They had paused for lunch and had eaten on a great, grimy boulder. His clasp knife had become rusty and refused to open, so he struck it on the boulder. The boulder had given forth a strange, ringing sound. He had scraped it with his knife and succeeded in bringing out a spot dark-red in color, and with a metallic luster.

"Copper," he had muttered, turning to his lunch.

He had a strange lack of appetite. When again they were on their way, he had been silent for a long way. At last he had spoken.

"Swen, this ain't the MacKenzie."

"What is it then?" Swen had stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment.

"I don't know for sure, but I've got an idea. You know that boulder we ate our lunch on?"

“Sure.”

“Well, it’s solid copper; worth a fortune if only it was split up and brought to market, but here — hundreds of miles from a railroad — it’s worthless; just part of the scenery, that’s all. The only river I ever heard of that had such deposits in its bed is the Coppermine, which flows straight into the Arctic ocean.”

“And is — is — are there,” Swen had licked his lips dryly, “are there any people living on this river?”

“Might be a few Indians along it and Eskimo at the mouth; that’s all.”

“Then we’d better turn back.” Swen had drawn in his paddle.

“It’s too late for that. Our best chance is to shoot on down to the mouth and find the Eskimo. Mebby we can trade them out of a dog team when the snow gets a crust. Then we’ll make our way back, but, anyway, that’s where the game is, caribou, walrus, seal and the like, and that’s where we must go.”

Nothing more had been said till they had

built a cheery camp fire for a brief rest; then Swen had drawn a picture from his pocket, and, by the flickering light, had showed it to his pal.

“That ’s her,” he had whispered. “That ’s Freda.”

Waste had found himself looking at a laughing face wreathed in golden-brown hair. He had known it was golden-brown, because Swen had told him.

“That ’s her,” Swen had gone on. “I ’m going to buy her a red dress. She always liked red.”

“Yes,” Waste had said. “And she ought to have something that ’s kind of gold, like the sunset; something to match her hair.”

Swen had been struggling with the realization that they were facing a winter in the Arctic wilderness, far from any settled haunts of men. It had been too vast for him, and he had been dispelling dark despair by making plans for Freda, and Waste, understanding, had helped.

CHAPTER V

INDIANS

THE next night they had sighted a camp fire and had decided to drift by it in the shadows. Silently the kiak had glided downstream. As it had come nearer to the place where a fire flashed and flared, the boys had seen a number of Indians seated about it, smoking their pipes in silence. Their red blankets had stood out in sharp contrast to the black spruce boughs and the white snow which lay beyond. Without a touch of the paddle, and with eyes and ears strained, the boys had drifted on. Now an Indian had risen and seemed to gaze out upon the water, and their hearts had beat fast. But, stretching lazily, the Indian had lifted some spruce branches and thrown them on the fire. Then Waste had given a little gasp and had driven his paddle fiercely into the water, and it had

seemed inevitable that their shadows on the opposite bank must be seen. But no sign of knowledge of their presence had been made manifest, and soon they had been well in the shadows again.

“Huh!” Waste had breathed. “That was a close one!”

Then, because they were in the Indian’s hunting land and might come upon other wanderers, they had drifted on down the river.

With the moonlight giving the edge of every ripple a line of silver, with the wind sighing in the spruce trees, they had drifted on and on. Now and then there had come a crash through the brush, and their hands gripped their rifles. Was it caribou or skulking Indians? For the most part they had not known. But once a splendid, antlered creature had stepped boldly out into the edge of an eddy. What a wonderful shot! And they needed meat, too! But they were too near the Indian encampment to risk it. So they had drifted on.

Swen had fallen asleep and Waste had been

nodding, when, as if in a dream, he had heard a strange, rushing noise like the wind in the tree tops. Shaking himself into wakefulness, the boy had listened. It was not the wind; not a breath was stirring. Dipping in his paddle, he had shot the kiak toward shore. Then, realizing that the current had grown swifter, he had applied all his strength to the task. He had found himself whirling past overhanging willows and spruce at a rapid rate, while the rushing sound gradually took on the thunderous roar of a cataract.

Then Swen had awakened. With their combined efforts they had reached the bank, and then, while Swen had dug his paddle into the madly rushing waters, Waste had seized an overhanging bough. There had come a terrible wrench to his arms. For a moment it had seemed that he would be dragged from his place, but gripping the tough branches with grim determination, he had at last seen the kiak swing inshore. Narrowly they had averted a crash, and a moment later had thrown themselves panting on the bank beside their kiak.

“Must be some wonderful rapids down there!” Waste had exclaimed.

“Uh-huh!” Swen had grunted; “but I’d rather see ’em from the bank than from a kiak.”

Then dragging out their blankets, they had curled up beneath the spreading spruce boughs and slept.

Waste had been the first to wake. As he sat up and stretched himself, there had come to his ears sounds of snapping and cracking which set his nerves tingling. Could it be that the Indians had seen and followed them? Had they pulled their kiak ashore on the edge of another camp? Suddenly there had come a creaking groan and the sound of a tree crashing to earth. He had bounded to his feet, sure now that Indians were close at hand. Then, dropping on his hands and knees, he had crept toward the place from which the sound came. If there were Indians here, he must know, for their course must now be pursued on land to escape the rapids.

Now he had crept slowly forward, and now he had paused to listen. The only sound

which had disturbed the still air was a snapping, cracking sound, very faint and indistinct, with here and there a rustling thud as of some creature dropping to earth. Beginning to suspect what was happening, he had crept forward more rapidly. Then, after peering through the branches, he had burst forth into a loud laugh. The strange enemy who felled the trees of the forest was a colony of beavers.

But instantly the boy had regretted his mirth. The sly creatures had disappeared. Their meat would have made a very fine breakfast.

"Oh, well," he had sighed, as he had rejoined his companion and told of this near-adventure, "I don't know as we ought to use our rifles so close to the Indians, anyway."

"But, say!" he had exclaimed suddenly, "we can get 'em. We'll drive stakes before the entrance to their houses and then dig 'em out!"

They got busy at once cutting slim willow stakes, long enough to be driven in the mud bottom of the little stream on which the beaver

dams were built, and in half an hour they had had two fine, fat beavers stretched out on the bank.

“Might as well get enough to last us two or three days,” Waste had said, pulling up the stakes and preparing to attack another house.

In two hours they had obtained seven beavers and were broiling one over a small fire.

“That settles the meat problem,” Waste had sighed, as they finished the meal. “Now for the rapids.”

The rapids in the Coppermine had proved to be both very dangerous and very numerous. Hardly would one be passed and the drift downstream begun than they would catch the roar of another. To add to their discomforts, the weather had become bitter cold. The stream had begun taking on a fringe of ice along its banks. This had made their journey doubly dangerous. Finally, one night, with the roar of a mighty cataract in their ears, they had fought the ice for two hours before making a landing.

“That settles it,” Waste had panted, as he finally had stretched himself out on shore. “No more travel on the Coppermine. We ’ve got to make a sled and wait for snow.”

As if in answer to their needs a heavy snow had fallen that night. Sleeping beneath the boughs of a tall spruce, which completely shed the snow, they had found themselves in an almost perfect snow house the next morning.

They had traveled so far that all fear of Indians had left their minds. Building a roaring fire before a shelving bank, they had begun work on a sled, which would fit the rounding bottom of their kiak.

[This work had lasted two days. At the end of this time they had become aware that they were short of meat again. With no beaver houses in sight, and all the small streams locked in ice, this meant a hunt through the forest for big game. They might easily find hare or ptarmigan, but their supply of ammunition would not permit of shooting such small animals. So, cachéing their kiak in a tree, to protect it from the foxes, they

had taken their rifles and had gone tramping away through the timber. There was barren land two miles beyond the river. Here they could get an unrestricted view of the surrounding country and might reasonably hope to spy some caribou on their way south from their summer feeding ground. In this they had not been disappointed. But to stalk a caribou in this open country, where only narrow valleys offer hiding places, and where every breeze is an eager messenger to the keen-scented creatures, is a difficult task, and one which consumes much time. When, at last, they were on their way back through the forest with burdens of meat on their backs, it was growing dusk. They were hardly in the forest when it had become quite dark. But this did not trouble them; they had no difficulty in picking up the trail of the morning.

All at once, as they neared camp, Waste had stopped to listen. An unwonted sound had caught his ear. Was it the howl of a wolf or yelp of a dog? He could not tell. It did not come again, so they had pressed on.

“Hist!” He had stopped again and whispered, “Look!” at the same time pointing to where their camp was.

A light had shone through the shadowy branches.

“Did n’t think our camp fire’d last that long,” Swen had whispered.

“Did n’t,” Waste had answered. “It ’s Indians or some one, and they ’ve taken our camp!”

They had crept a little closer. There could be no doubt of it. There had been a roaring fire, and the passing of shadows before them had told them there were men about it. They had crept still closer to obtain a better view. And presently, fearing that they might be detected by a nosing dog, they had paused.

And here they were. Waste shook himself from the review of events to a lively interest in things close at hand. Here was a catastrophe, indeed. They were in an Arctic wilderness with food for a few days, ammunition for a few days longer, and no blankets to protect them from the cold as they slept.

"It 's a wonder they did n't trail us," said Swen.

"Knew they did n't need to," answered Waste. "Knew we 'd have to come back. That 'd save them the trouble."

Creeping back over the trail for some distance, they climbed into the spruce trees, whose interlocking boughs allowed them to travel in the air for a few rods. Then they dropped down among the needles.

Waste cut off some strips of caribou meat and spread them on the crusted snow.

"Freeze in a moment; then it won't be bad eating," he explained.

He stretched himself on the needles and began to plan. After a time he rose and, telling Swen to wait there, disappeared. Shortly he returned.

"They 're Indians, all right," he whispered. "Saw their blankets. Was scared that their dogs would spot me, but they did n't."

"Now, I 'll tell you," he whispered, after munching frozen caribou meat in silence for some time, "we 've got to frighten 'em away."

Swen had visions of two boys frightening

away a band of Indians who were well supplied with rifles, but he said nothing.

“Pete McGuire, over at Nome, got lost over this way once and lived among the Little Sticks Indians for two years. They have a great and terrible bugaboo, called Ah-ha-took-sook. He’s supposed to be a giant eighteen feet tall. But he is seen oftenest crawling through the forest on hands and knees, his face shining like the moon. If I could only, —” Waste paused in thought. Then he gave forth a chuckle.

“I might do it!” he whispered, as if to himself. “There’s a good hard-packed snow-bank in that open spot over yonder, and I’ve got my little pocket flashlight.”

They crept over to the snowbank, and there Waste cut out a block of snow three feet square and one foot thick. Setting this on edge, he began to carve on one side a round hole some fourteen inches across. He worked carelessly at first. But finally he took the very point of his knife, and scraping a little here, a little there, worked with the care of a sculptor. At last he turned the block

around, so it would face away from the river bank, and told Swen to hold the flashlight so its light would just cover the hole. From a distance he studied the effect for a time, then returned to his work. This was repeated again and again. At last he heaved a sigh of satisfaction, and, holding the light, told Swen to go around and look.

Swen uttered a grunt of surprise. Before him, glowing with light, burned a face. The nose shadow was just where it should be; the teeth were shown in a grin.

"If that don't get 'em, we might as well give up," smiled Waste, quite proud of his handiwork.

Cutting two crotched branches from a tree, they made a sort of sled beneath the snow block, with the upper limb of the crotch holding the block in an upright position. Then, in the shadowy moonlight, they began creeping toward the now sleeping camp.

When they had come within a hundred yards a dog barked. Lying flat behind their snow barrier they watched and listened. An Indian rubbed his eyes and grunted, then another and another.

“Now,” whispered Waste. Swen switched on the light, while Waste puckered his lips and uttered such a sound as Swen had not heard on land or sea.

Instantly there came a piercing scream from the camp, and in another second all was in commotion. Startled screams echoed through the spruce trees, while up the white bank dark figures plunged to lose themselves in the forest, pausing only for a second’s glance at the terrible burning face, which continued to roar and chuckle at them.

“Now,” whispered Waste, as he switched off the light, and, gripping his rifle, sprang forward.

Once they reached the camp, it took but a moment’s glance to tell them that their kiak had been undisturbed. Their sled, too, was untouched. With a hasty glance to right and left, to make certain they were not being trapped, they crept forward. They dragged the kiak upon their sled and went racing away down the bank to the river’s brink. Here a narrow collar of ice fringed the river. Twenty feet wide in places, in others,

where the current dashed strongly shoreward, scarcely five, it offered them a smooth road to travel. Treacherous it was, and often interrupted by rapids that dashed over tumbled rock piles, yet it was their only chance, for through the scrub forest ran no sled trails.

So, little knowing the nature of the people who lived toward the river's mouth, and little dreaming that only a half-day's journey from them a boy, Soolook, slept, and in his sleep dreamed of meeting the great and terrible Kabluna — he of the single eye, the white forehead, the giant's stature, and the black instrument of death that kills at a distance with a magic of great noises — little dreaming, too, how in many ways they resembled this fabled man — they of the white face and the rifle — they hastened on their way.

CHAPTER VI

SOOLOOK AND THE RAVEN FATHER

A DULL brown spot moved on the surface of a darker brown rock. The rock lay on the slope of a hillside. Below lay a snowbank, and on it lay another dark brown object, which seemed at times to thrash about and scatter the snow. The object on the rock was an Eskimo boy, Soolook; the one on the snowbank was a great bull caribou.

Soolook, on awaking from his sleep beneath the cliff, had not gone back to the trail which had crossed his path, — the trail of two men who wore strange footgear. He had suddenly taken notice of his own worn mukluks, also of his dog's sore feet, and reason had told him that a journey homeward was wise. But perhaps more than that was the realization that he had already performed a feat that was still unsung, the killing of the Oo-ming-muck-

suit; there would be time enough for the other, that which was to be his greatest adventure, — his visit to the land of the Kabluna.

So he had hurried homeward. At first he fed on the rich, red reindeer meat. When this was gone, he had shot three ptarmigan, and then an Arctic hare. A white fox, too, had fallen into his hands. When he was but half a day's journey from the place where his tribe should be camped, he had come upon this lone bull caribou loitering in rich feeding grounds on his way south. With an eye to feeding his people, he had stalked him.

For three days he had watched the animal paw up the snow to feed on lichens. Three days he had hoped the caribou would feed close enough to the rock to come within range of his long bow. And for three days he had been disappointed. But the Eskimo is a patient hunter; so he lay still and waited.

At last the buck rose and began to nose about in the moss for more white lichens. The boy followed him with greedy eye. He was fat from long feeding on bitter willow leaves and rich reindeer moss. What roasts his



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What roasts his haunches would make! What a parka his sleek coat! *Page 86.*

haunches would make! What a parka his sleek coat! What mittens the dark coverings of his legs! Surely he was worth waiting for!

Closer and closer he came, sometimes circling, sometimes pausing to lift his head and listen, but ever feeding closer to the brown rock where the silent figure lay. Now the boy could distinguish the separate prongs of his antlers; now count the little forks one by one; now catch the bits of velvet which had been rubbed free by contact with willow shrubs. Still the boy lay motionless. He must not miss. He would be an honor to his family, a benefactor to his tribe, the old men would praise him, and the young men would honor him. No, he must not miss.

But now the caribou seemed disturbed. He tossed his head and stamped a foot. Soolook became alarmed. Was he about to lose his prey?

Measuring the distance with a practiced eye and stealthily rising to a half-sitting position, he fitted the arrow to the string and slowly, silently bent his bow. Now his arrow was in position, his string sang to the

lightest touch ; now his eye shot a glance down the arrow till it rested on the brown side of the silent creature. Right there the arrow would enter his heart.

But just at that instant there darted from the hillside a dark, speeding object, — an arrow, but not his. With a wild snort, the deer reared and plunged, then sank slowly to earth.

Silently the boy released his string and placed his arrow in its quiver. Then he stretched out on the rock again to wait.

“Oboogarat !” he murmured, as the other hunter ran forward to bend over the caribou.

But what was this ? The old shamin, for Oboogarat was the chief village witch doctor, was not drawing his knife to skin his prey ; he did not even draw his arrow. He stooped and went through some strange motions, then, with a cunning glance which swept all the horizon, he turned and walked rapidly away.

For a brief time the boy lay there, considering. But the moment the shamin had disappeared, he sprang to his feet and hastened home to camp by another way. Before

entering camp, he hid his trophies of the Ooming-muck-suit in a rocky ledge.

He found the shamin the center of an admiring group. Men, women and children crowded about him, eagerly drinking in his words. As Soolook made his way toward him, he heard him announce that he was about to perform one of his most awesome feats of spirit-control. He would kill a caribou, though he was far from it. He had summoned his Indian Spirit and had given him an arrow. About the feather of this arrow he had tied a red leather cord. After he had finished the dance which was to weave the spell over the Indian Spirit, he should command him to kill. Then they would all go and see for themselves how he had been obeyed. Indeed, they should all have a fine roast for their meal that day.

Soolook was interested, for had he not heard of these wonderful feats? And had he not longed to see one performed? For the moment, in his eagerness, he forgot his hate and distrust of the dark-faced shamin. Excitedly he watched the wild dance, caught

each sound of drum beat and each weird "I-I-um-ah-ah-ah" of the song. Eagerly he followed the throng that rushed along behind the shamin.

But what could this mean? They were going around the very hill, where, a few hours before, he had seen the shamin's arrow kill a caribou. Yes, they were going to that very spot. Then, like fire that has smouldered long and at last burst into flame, a new anger exploded in his heart; anger at a shamin who could be so low as to trick his people, to claim a power which he did not possess.

He did not need to go quite to the place. He knew all too well the surprise of the people; the loud shouts of praise; the swollen strut of the shamin. So he lingered on the hillside until the people began to return joyfully, bearing their hunks of venison on their shoulders.

As he wandered aimlessly, his foot caught on a dwarf spruce. This strange bush that hugs the tundra, creeping on the very earth—root, trunk and branches—makes a wonderful kindling. Reaching for his knife to cut

it, he discovered that his knife was not in its scabbard.

“Must have lost it as I lay on the rock,” he thought, and turned toward the higher point on the hill.

How Oboogarat happened to pass that way the boy could not tell, but just as he reached the rock, to his consternation, he saw the shamin stoop and pick up the lost knife. At once the boy's flushed face revealed the fact that he knew all.

With a wolf-like snarl, the shamin took three steps forward. The boy stood defenseless before him. He could kill him with a thrust; yet the shamin paused, and a look of cunning overspread his face. He said nothing, but for a moment he stared at the boy. Then, throwing the knife upon the ground, he strode away.

He had said nothing with his lips, but with his eyes he had said:

“I will not kill you. It is not necessary; you will not tell. For, though you hate me, you also fear me. I am a powerful shamin. I can cast a black spell over your

family, and they all will perish. Oh, no; you will not tell!"

And in his heart the boy knew that he would not. His love for family was stronger than love for truth; at least, truth might wait a better time for its unfolding. But now there rose up in his heart a desire for some new power, some knowledge of spirits which would give him strength to face this crafty enemy. Oh! If only he could know Raven Father! He who had flown from the moon and created man and all living things. If he could but know him, how different all might be!

Already the long twilight had deepened into darkness. It was almost the season of perpetual night again. The next morning when Soolook awoke, he found his deerskins buried in snow, which was still drifting down among the black spruce boughs. The camp was in action; a move to the coast had been announced.

After doing his share of the packing and loading, the boy stole away for a long farewell stroll into the forest. He had come to

love the needle-carpeted wilderness. The silent shadows had become a part of his life. But he knew as well as any that life in the forest with the caribou and wild fowl gone south was impossible. So he wandered among the trees for a farewell look and a last long listen.

As he sauntered on and on, he penetrated deeper into the forest than ever before and came at last to a broad expanse of water. This, he told himself, was Great Bear Lake, and his heart thumped wildly at thought of it. For was it not known that on the other shore, hundreds of miles away, there live some members of a strange and terrible tribe, the Kabluna? What wonder then that he strained his eyes, as though to send his gaze hundreds of miles and see these unusual people at their work?

He did not hunt that day. He dreamed, and mingled with the dream was fear and a charm, such as the bird must feel who looks into the eye of a serpent. Would he ever meet the terrible Kabluna, and if he did would he perish?

And so he turned back into the forest. He had gone but a little way when he came upon something very curious. It was a pile of rocks three times the length of a harpoon shaft and rearing right up toward the sky. It was slender, not broader than the length of an arrow. It was held together by a peculiar hard mud and seemed hollow, for there was an opening at the base. What could it be, and who had made it? He had often come upon stone houses built by the spirits many years before and never lived in by the Eskimo, but these were low and round, like the snow houses of his people.

As he scuffed his foot in the soft snow a black object rolled out. He examined it curiously. It was charcoal. He began kicking about, here and there. Everywhere for a broad space there was charcoal. Slowly it dawned upon him that here had once been the mammoth dwelling place of the Kabluna. And, once he realized this, he wished to run away. Then he laughed at his fear, for the charcoal told him the house had been burned many years before.

But this tall pile of stone? What could it be?

“Perhaps it was an entrance for spirits that come from the moon,” he mused.

Then he threw himself flat on his stomach to peer up to the sky. But at that instant something happened which caused him to glide back swiftly. There came a strange scratching from within the pile, and out walked a great raven.

Soolook's eyes bulged. He was sure it was the largest raven he had ever seen, and his beak was blacker than any old ivory he had ever dug from the sand. To emphasize the blackness of his plumage one white feather was half hidden away in his right wing.

The raven stared at the boy, making strange guttural sounds in his throat.

To hide his confusion the boy stared up at the towering pile of stones.

“Nagoovaruk! Ca?” (Very good; is it not so?) The voice seemed to come from within his own body, and as he stood there trembling, it was repeated, “Nagoovaruk! Ca?”

He was so frightened he did not dare stir from the spot. But, by standing still, he found his courage come creeping back.

“Nagoovaruk! Ca?” It came again. This time the voice seemed to be at his feet. His gaze dropped to the bird and seemed glued there. And, yes, — the raven opened his mouth, and from his black throat there rattled:

“Nagoovaruk! Ca?”

Fascinated, the boy dropped to his old position and stared smilingly at the raven.

At once the bird began to talk rapidly, but not one word did the boy understand. The language was strange to him. Finally the raven stopped and stared at him. Then, closing one eye, he said slowly:

“Azeezruk! Ca?” (Very bad, is it not so?)

To which the boy answered, “Eh-eh, Azeezruk.” (Yes, very bad.)

For hours the boy lay in the snow, listening to the prattle of the raven, but hearing in his own tongue only the same two expressions: “Azeezruk! Ca?” and “Nagoovaruk! Ca?”

“And, after all,” he told himself, as he rose stiffly, realizing that he must hurry along after his tribe, “if one but knows what is good and what is bad, why should he speak of other things?”

As he hastened away from the enchanted spot, he was both glad and sorry that the tribe was leaving the forest; glad because there would now be no danger of Oboogarat making this discovery which he had made, and sorry because it might well be that he would never again speak to the Raven Father. But this one thing was true; he *had* spoken to him, and *had* learned many things from him that were both good and bad. Surely he need never fear Oboogarat with his many spirits again.

And when eventually he found himself in the tribal circle, he returned the sour look of the old shamin with one of such defiance that Oboogarat dropped a fat leg of duck into the flaming fire and lost that part of his meal.

Soolook paused, listened, then dropped on his knees behind an up-ended ice boulder.

Had he seen a shadow dart across his path? His heart beat loudly.

All about him was night, perpetual night; the long night of the Arctic. And about him, too, lay ice and snow, the ice and snow of the ocean's blanket. Long now his tribe had been living on the ocean's ice. Building a snow village here and hunting until the seals became scarce, then moving to another spot and building a new village, they were like phantom fairies in their wandering.

Soolook had been sent three times to bring dried caribou meat from the forest, and three times he had talked to the Raven Father. He had even ventured to offer the bird some of his dried meat. This he had eaten with many a "Nagoovaruk! Ca?" And on the third journey he had come hopping and flapping into camp with the boy. This had been a proud day in the boy's life, for the people had cried;

"See! Soolook is a friend of the Raven Father! Surely he is a powerful shamin!"

But Oboogarat had remained in the shadows, a dark and menacing enemy.

From village to village the Raven Father had traveled with Soolook, and everywhere they had found fish and seal in abundance. Never had there been such a year for his Eskimo people.

But now, some terrible calamity had occurred. From their last camp to the one they now had newly built, Raven Father had not followed. What could have happened? Had he become displeased, and for this reason returned to the moon? If so, then surely famine would follow. Soolook listened for a moment, then he hastened on his way.

At last he came in sight of the many white-domed snow houses which had lately been the homes of his people. And as he neared them, his heart gave a great leap of joy, for he caught the voice of the Raven Father:

“Azeezruk! Ca? Azeezruk! Ca?” he was screaming.

Guided by the sound, the boy came to a snow house, and to his horror found that its entrance had been blocked with snow. The Raven Father was a prisoner. What rascal

could have done this? None would dare it save Oboogarat.

He kicked the snow away and out walked the Raven Father, croaking, "Nagoovaruk! Ca?" But at once the bird seemed disturbed, and, ruffling his feathers, shrieked, "Azeezruk! Ca?"

The boy glanced behind him, then dropped flat on the ice. He was not a second too soon, for an arrow, flashing over his head, crashed against the snow house.

Knowing now that he must fight, the boy dashed at the shamin, who had shot the arrow, and bore him to the ice. It seemed an unequal battle, for the shamin was old and strong. Over and over they rolled, gripping and struggling, deaf to the wild screams of the raven. Now one was on top, and now the other. But moment by moment the boy found his strength leaving him. His breath came in short gasps. It seemed as if he could struggle no longer. Suddenly, with a deft turn, the shamin threw him on his back, and, pouncing upon him, brandished his copper-bladed knife above him. Then he paused, not in pity,



Over and over they rolled, gripping and struggling, deaf to the wild screams of the raven. *Page 100.*

but in joy ; as a cat teases his victim, so he would prolong the life of the helpless boy.

But at that instant, there came to the boy's reeling senses a cry, shrill and strong:

“Azeezruk ! Ca ? Azeezruk ! Ca ?”

It was the raven. For a second the shamin's cheek blanched, and his hand trembled. This was the boy's opportunity. With one wild, wrenching convulsion, he threw his adversary in air. The knife went clattering against an ice pile, and the boy sat pinning the shamin's hands to the ice.

The enemy now was wholly within Soolook's power. He might kill him if he would. But to kill a man ! Hot anger surged in his veins. The man did not deserve to live, but he, — could he kill a man ? And as his blood cooled, he saw the long line of battles which must follow, for, according to the law of the Eskimo, a life must be given for a life. No, he could not bring this upon his people. Then, smiling a grim smile, he secured the shamin's knife, and rising, bade him go. For a long time the boy meditated there in silence, then he arose, and with the Raven Father flapping and

croaking beside him, started on the journey back to his tribe.

The long tramp to the deserted village and the subsequent battle with the shamin had tired him more than he knew. He had not made half the distance to the present home of his tribe when he crept into a sort of natural house of ice and sat down with drooping head to sleep. For a long time he heard the croaking "Azeezruk! Ca?" of the raven. But at last these sounds appeared to grow fainter and fainter.

How long he slept he could not tell. When he awoke he listened for the familiar voice of Raven Father. Not hearing it, he sprang to his feet and, racing out upon a broad ice pan, began to call. His calls brought no answer. What could have happened? Had the wary shamin again spirited the Raven Father away? Or had he, Soolook, done something to displease the wise old bird, and had he flown away to other lands?

Whatever might be the solution, Soolook found himself very lonely, and resolved in his inmost self that if the Raven Father did

not appear within the next three days, he would not only go in search of him in the scrub forest, but in case he failed in his search, he would attempt a journey to the Land of the Kabluna.

CHAPTER VII

TRAPPED

FOR three days Soolook sat glooming by the seal-oil lamp or went roaming over the ice, hunting little for seal but listening long for the croaking voice of his friend, Raven Father.

Finally, when he could stand it no longer, he took his bow and arrows, and with some dried meat slung over his back in a pook-sack, went marching away toward the forest. Many hunters told him he would not find caribou at this time of the year, but he cared little for that. He was sure there were snowshoe rabbits hidden in the bushes, and ptarmigan eating berries on the hillsides, so what had he to fear?

In time he reached the forest. It was winter, and such a cold winter he had never seen. When he removed his deerskin mittens his hands seemed to crinkle up on the outside,

and he could not cover them too quickly. As he passed through the willow bushes the twigs, which were so elastic and tough in summer, snapped from the trunks like icicles. It was still, too. When he entered the forest not a breath of air stirred; not a dead leaf waved on the trees. Looking up, he saw the steam from his own breath streaming skyward above the tree tops. He paused to listen. A snow bunting flittered from a bush and seemed to make the noise of a ptarmigan. Far away, indistinct, he seemed to hear something walking. Could it be a caribou? For a long time he stood there, but did not hear it again. As he hurried on, the scraping, creaking sound of his own footsteps drowned all other noises. He had traveled some distance when he again paused to listen. This time the forest seemed to echo to the crash and snap of traveling caribou.

“Must have wakened them from sleep,” the boy whispered to himself.

With a wildly beating heart he stood there trying to peer into the shadowy moonlight. Once a brown streak crossed his line of vision.

It was a caribou, but far away. But by this he learned their line of travel. If he were to station himself on the point of yonder hill, he might get one as it passed. He would never be able to reach them by stalking; his footsteps sounded too loudly in this vast stillness.

He was about to go on toward the point, when in the midst of the rattling crash of caribou travel there came a different noise. He felt sure it was like the sound of his own footsteps. Who could it be? Had the old witch doctor followed him into the forest? Was some strange tribe hunting here?

He listened, but the sound was not repeated. At last he reassured himself with the thought that he may have imagined it; or that, at the worst, he had heard a wolf stalking the caribou. Having caught a glimpse of a gray streak among the spruce trees, he felt sure that this last supposition was correct.

He began moving stealthily forward till he was near the point. In his path lay two tree trunks which had fallen; the upper one was old, half-rotted away. They were the length

of an arrow apart. He would slide between them, and then he would be at his vantage point. He was nearly over, when there came a snap, a crash, and a sharp pain in his right leg. The upper trunk had fallen. His leg was pinned beneath it; he was trapped in a deadfall.

He tried to lift the log, but strain as he would, he could not budge it. There was nothing in reach which he could use as a pry. His leg was already growing numb. He tried to think how long it would be till his leg would be frozen. If worst came to worst, he told himself, he could cut it off with his copper-bladed knife and free himself; it would not hurt. But of what use was a one-legged hunter? He might as well be dead.

Then he thought of the strange footsteps. He felt certain that some human being had set this deadfall. Whoever he was, he must trust him; there was no other way.

In a moment the silent forest was echoing with his cry for help.

There came an answer, and then the whole forest seemed to burst into a terrible roar. It

was like the great noise that comes with the rain in summer, but ten times more terrible.

“Kabluna!” the boy murmured. “They kill with a magic of great noises.”

For a long time he could not call again, so great was his fear of the Kabluna, but at last he dampened his dry tongue with snow and shouted as loudly as he could.

Soon a tall man, strangely dressed, came crashing through the trees. In an instant he applied a pry to the deadfall, and the boy was free. Then stripping off the skin-boot, the stranger began chafing the lad’s foot with his own bare hands. Finally he replaced the boot, and without a word he put his arm across the boy’s shoulder and half-carried him to where a light shone from a strange dwelling made of logs and sod.

Many strange things were inside the cabin. The boy’s eyes saw them all. But as the heat entered his body, and the man rubbed his leg with strange-smelling liquid, pain began to shoot through and through him, and with the pain came the desire to sleep;

so, very soon, he was buried beneath wolf skins fast asleep.

After many hours he awoke to find that his leg no longer pained him, but when he attempted to walk, he gave it up with a cry of anguish. He would not be able to walk for many days.

The stranger did not speak his language, but told him things by signs. There were many queer things about the cabin, and almost every action of his host was a mystery to the boy. But the man was a wise fellow. He saw that the boy was a close observer and allowed him to unravel the mysteries of coffee-pot, sour-dough pancakes, sheet-iron stove, kerosene lamp, and a hundred other things in his own way.

One day, as the boy limped about the cabin, something dropped from his sleeve. The stranger wished to know what it was. Soolook, untying the little leather sack, showed him the two round balls and indicated that it was a charm taken from the body of a wild duck.

The stranger smiled, but he did not say by

signs, "This is no charm; it is only two lead shot, which the white man put in the duck's body with his powerful gun."

After that, Soolook saw ptarmigan killed with a shotgun, and when the shot fell from the meat, as he ate, he began to think. He looked at a pile of shot in a box, then at the one taken from the ptarmigan; then again at his charm. After that he threw his charm into the fire, and the stranger smiled again. Each day some new mystery was solved.

Then one day the stranger said, by signs and pictures in the snow:

"Some time you may take me to your people. You will tell them all the things you have seen. You will tell them that I have come to help them; to explain many mysteries for them. You will be a great help to your people, for I will give them the great noise-maker for copper-pointed spears and stone pots. I will teach them to save the skins of foxes, mink, and beaver, and for these I will give them knives and needles, and all the noise-makers they need for hunting caribou, walrus and seal."

Then Soolook's heart bounded with joy. "A great help to his people!" Was not that his most cherished desire?

But the stranger was too busy at that time, tending his own traps and deadfalls, to make the journey over land and ice, so when Soolook's leg was strong again, he took his lance, his bow and arrow, and a new knife with a blade as white and as keen as new-formed ice on the river, and started out toward the home of his people. The stranger had offered him a dog team, but Soolook had refused to take it.

Two questions puzzled him: Where was the Raven Father? Often for hours he had sought him in vain in the forest. And now he was returning without him.

Then there was the question regarding the stranger. Was he the long-talked-of Kabluna? His face, to be true, was white; but he had two eyes and not one. Then, too, he killed with a magic of great noises, but he was scarcely a hand taller than Soolook himself. Long he had pondered over this question. Often he had wished to ask many ques-

tions of the stranger, but knew no language in which to ask them. Now, as he journeyed homeward, he concluded that this was not the Kabluna, but was a member of some far inferior race who, by some trick of magic, had secured certain secrets of the Kabluna, and foremost among these was the art of killing by a magic of great noises.

On his journey to the village, he remembered the hiding place of the horns of the Oo-ming-muck-suit, and passing that way brought them with him to his tribe. Often, in the long evenings, he had told the story of his fight with this terrible beast, but many had doubted. Now he had the proof, and with the white-bladed knife flashing in his hand, he told new and strange tales of his visit to a man who, though not the Kabluna, had yet learned many of that great one's secrets.

With this his fame grew, and though his power as a shamin was doubted by many, since Raven Father had left him, still he was counted a valiant hunter and an adventurer of no mean standing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TALKING RAVEN

It was only a few hours after Soolook had left the lone trapper's cabin when two men came dragging themselves toward that place. Twice the younger of the two fell and lay prone upon the snow. Twice his companion stooped and lifted him to his feet; then they staggered onward. They carried no sleeping-bags, drew no sled behind them, no rifles were slung on their shoulders. All these things had been abandoned long ago. Their parkas of deerskin and trousers of sealskin were patched all over with pieces of dried rabbit skin. A full beard covered the face of the older man; a sparse stubble made the younger one's face ugly. Their hair had grown long. Their fingers, inside ragged mittens, were raw and bleeding from many frostbites.

The younger man addressed his companion

as Swen; the older, in reply, named the younger "Waste."

And so they proved to be the very two whose tracks months before Soolook had contemplated following. Now, by only a few hours, he had missed them again. And they, too, had long ago back-tracked him to the place of his strange kill, in the hopes of finding his home. They had found instead the bones of wolves and a musk ox eaten clean by the foxes and half-buried by the drifting snow. They had found, also, a broken arrow shaft, pointed with copper. They had wondered at this, and had decided that, if opportunity offered, they would visit these people.

A blizzard had obliterated the last sign of Soolook's trail before they could return to the place where they had first found it. So they had started on an aimless wandering which, in the nick of time, had brought them to the door of a friendly stranger.

By MacDonald, this trapper, who had become Soolook's friend, their journey was welcomed. Having made his way Far North for many winters, he had learned wisdom

through experience. Equipped with large quantities of ammunition, a number of dogs, a great number of traps and little food, he lived off the meat of the land, and, since he still had rifles and cartridges, there was no reason why these strangers should not live with him and add many a furry trophy to his treasure store before the spring break-up.

The three men were soon on the best of terms, and the strangers, when their hands had healed, and they had been provided with new skin clothing, ranged far through the forest in search of white wolf and caribou.

One day a raven came fluttering into camp and began pecking at the meat thrown out for the dogs. Now a raven is no uncommon sight in the snowy wilderness, but this was no ordinary raven.

“That ’s the queerest raven I ever saw!” exclaimed the trapper one day, noticing him as he hopped down from a tree and began quarreling with the dogs over their daily dinner. “He ’s got such a strong way of squawking. You ’d almost think he was swearing at the dogs.”

"He is," grinned Swen. "Coming as near to it as he can in the language he knows."

"Yes, I suppose so. Crow language, you mean."

"No, Eskimo."

"You don't mean to say?" Macdonald, the trapper, stood with mouth open, staring.

"Sure," grinned Swen. "Listen! What he's saying is 'Azeezruk. Ca?' which, in good Eskimo, means, 'Very bad. Is it not so?' And you can make it as much stronger as suits your taste. Probably somebody's tamed him and split his tongue."

Macdonald shook his head and walked away. But from that day Waste Warren and Swen Petersen and the talking raven became fast friends. Many a choice morsel did Waste save for the strange wonder. As for the raven, he reciprocated by perching himself on the boy's shoulder, or on the rafter above his bunk, and repeating over and over again, "Azeezruk! Ca? Nagoovaruk! Ca?" And there came a time when this little speech of his was a great blessing to the boy.

One day a strange-looking person drove into camp. He had but two dogs hitched to his sled; his clothes were in rags; his face was gaunt with hunger.

"Been huntin' gold and found it!" he exclaimed, as he dropped a heavy sack on the floor and asked for food and shelter.

It was plain from the first that Macdonald did not like him, but as he expressed it, "One white man can't turn another out," so he stayed. And before he had been there a week it became quite evident that he was restless; he seemed haunted by some unnamed fear. Once he was standing with his back to the dogs, when the raven hopped down and began his "Azeezruk! Ca?" He jumped and turned about, exclaiming, "What was that?"

At other times he would be standing quite by himself, when he would suddenly wheel about, as if expecting to see some one sneaking up from behind. Waste shared Macdonald's dislike for the man, who called himself Elliot. But mingled with his feeling of dislike was one of pity. He concluded that

the man was the victim of his ceaseless wanderings alone, and that he would recover his mental balance if he stayed with people long enough.

"Where 'd you find your gold?" he ventured to inquire of the wanderer one day.

"Headwaters of the MacKenzie," the other mumbled.

"Up one of the branches?"

"Yes, Hare Indian River."

"Far up?"

"Yes."

"One of the forks? Which one? What was it like?"

Too late, Waste saw that he had showed too much interest, for the man closed up like a clam.

"Probably 'fraid I 'd jump his claim," Waste told himself, but in his innermost soul he was sure this was not the only reason, and this conviction made him strangely restless.

From Macdonald, Waste learned the story of Soolook's stay in the cabin. At once he was eager to visit the boy's people. When

he decided to take a sled-trip around the lake and across the barren lands to the Eskimo villages, which were supposed to be on the shores of the Arctic, he was easily persuaded to take Elliot with him.

"You won't take that crow along, will you?" the man asked the day before they started.

"Guess we'll leave that to him," smiled Waste. "If he chooses to come along, we can't well stop him, as long as he furnishes his own transportation."

"I don't like birds that talk," grumbled Elliot.

Waste thought little of this. "Just one of his strange notions," he said to Macdonald, as he spoke of it later.

After a long sleep the two swung out into the trail. They had seven dogs. The trail was hard-packed, and the temperature was ideal. It was going to be a great trip. It was true that the Indians had told Macdonald that the Eskimo of this very Far Northland were bloodthirsty and cruel, but one hears all sorts of tales from the Indians. Macdonald

had said he thought they were much the same as other natives. He had never made a trip to that shore, but this was because they were supposed to have nothing very valuable to trade.

After sixteen hours of travel, with the moon shining down upon them, and the Big Dipper swinging about the North Star, they camped in the lee of a cut-bank and prepared to cook dinner. Waste had gone down to the edge of a small stream to chip out ice for melting, when he heard Elliot swearing loudly. He expected to find that the tent had blown over or a dog had run away with the bacon; but instead, when he returned, he found the talking raven sitting at the top of the cut-bank squawking, "Azeezruk! Ca?" while the miner continued to swear.

"What 'd he do?" grinned Waste.

"Nothin'. But there's no luck with a bird like that trailin' you!" And Elliot began to swear again.

Supper began to take the edge from his anger, and presently they stretched out in their sleeping-bags, and Waste was soon fast asleep.

He was awakened later by some movement in the tent. Opening his eyes slowly, he saw Elliot stealing upon the raven, who had stalked into the tent to sleep. His hand was nearly upon him when, with a squawk, and an "Azeezruk!" the bird bounded away. With wild rage in his eye, the man seized a knife and slashed at the raven. At that instant the boy's hand shot out and gripped the man's wrist.

"Let me go — you," roared Elliot, struggling to free himself. "Let me go; I'm going to kill him. If you don't let me go, I'll kill you!"

Instantly the boy realized that he was entering a life-and-death struggle with no witness save the raven and the glimmering moon. He had only half struggled from his sleeping-bag when the man was upon him. Over and over they rolled. Out of the tent, over the snow, down the bank they tumbled. The boy was free from his sleeping-bag now, but the miner had a freed right hand. Brandishing the knife, he fell upon the boy, but his knuckles received a sharp knock, and the

knife rattled to the snow. Then they were at it again. Panting, struggling, with torn garments and purple faces, they waged stubborn battle. But the clean living of the boy prevailed, and at last he sat upon the other's chest and had his arms pinned to the snow.

He remained like that until the other ceased his heavy breathing and his livid face turned pale. Then, securing the knife, he arose.

It was a very humble apology the man made as he thanked the boy for sparing his life, but there lurked something in his eye which Waste did not like. He slept no more that night, and when morning came was undecided whether to send the man back alone, go back with him, or trust him to go on into the great unknown. He finally decided upon the last course. And again they turned toward the coast of the Arctic.

After that Waste slept with all their weapons by his side, and his dog-leader — half-wolf, half-bloodhound — close to him. But the criminal, if criminal he were, seemed to have been conquered, for he did his work well, never grumbled over the hard trail, and paid

no further attention to the raven. At times he dropped far behind the sled, but always returned when it was time to eat. And so they traveled until, crossing a series of low-rolling hills and then a broad, flat tundra, they came to the ice of the ocean.

And now, as he gazed away across the white expanse, where giant cakes formed planes between jagged mountains of broken splinters of ice, the boy saw in the distance a dark spot which seemed an island. But this was no island, he knew, for had it been the land would have been white with snow. No, it was an Eskimo village. The dome-shaped houses of snow were white, it was true, but the harpoons, sleds and skins, hung out to dry, were black. He was approaching a village of these unknown people. And just then he felt a strong desire to turn back.

For a moment he paused. Elliot was far behind at that instant. Then his sled shot down the bank and he was away. If Elliot were the most loyal of companions, he could be no aid against a whole village. It was better, probably, that they approach singly.

But surely this wilderness of ice piles, with its purple shadows and its eternal silence, was ghostly. To bring the thing to a finish he pushed on rapidly. He had not nearly reached the village when he became conscious of being followed. And gradually, with a creepy feeling about his spine, he realized that he was being surrounded by dark figures, whose long, copper-pointed lances and harpoons gleamed in the moonlight. He had heard how these people killed a polar bear. Surrounding him they threw harpoons into him until a dozen skin ropes were fastened to him by a copper point buried in his tough skin. Then, like men at a tug-of-war, they held him from going this way or that, while a companion rushed in and finished him with a lance thrust through his heart. This was not a comforting thought.

But he pushed on with the dark figures appearing and disappearing, coming closer, becoming more numerous. And now he could catch the note of a song, or incantation, they were humming, "I-I-um-ya-ya-ya." This was most terrible of all. Waste wished himself

back in the snug quarters of the trapper's cabin. But that was all past. Well, then, he would take a stand.

This he did in the center of a broad ice pan. At first the dark figures darted from ice pile to ice pile, still humming their "I-I-um-ya-ya"; but at last, to a man, they stepped out upon the ice cake and advanced slowly in a circle. There were scores of them. If a fight followed, the boy would stand no show.

Standing by his sled, with his dogs whining at the mysterious singing, he waited. Now he could catch the glare of the wicked-looking lances more plainly, now catch the gleam of an eye, now hear the shuffle of their feet, as the song ceased for an instant. It seemed his nerves would break, but still he stood there.

Then, unexpectedly from the direction in which he had come, there came a cry. It was not Elliot who had uttered that cry, yet it was a cry of agony. Something was happening back there, for there came the mingled roar of voices and other sounds of a struggle. The humming of the natives took on a high pitch, — a weird, wild, shrill wail. Then,

all at once, there was silence, — deathlike silence. The struggle at a distance had ceased; the song had ended. Not a foot stirred, not a lance rattled. Then in the very midst of it there came the rustle of wings, followed by a hoarse, croaking voice:

“Azeezruk! Ca?”

It was the talking raven! With a clumsy flap, he lighted on the boy's shoulder.

And then, as if by magic, all was changed. Natives threw their harpoons and lances clattering to the ice, and with hands raised over their heads advanced, shouting in their native tongue:

“See! We are friendly! We have no weapons! We will do you no harm!”

But once they had shouted this, they began again their humming.

What could it all mean? The boy stood petrified by this sudden change.

A native approached with something in his hand. He was humming loudly. He handed to the boy a small bit of whale blubber. Thinking this part of a ceremony, Waste put it in his mouth and swallowed it.

Instantly there was an end to the song and a rush forward with friendly outstretched hands.

“Now we know you are no spirit! No! You have eaten whale blubber! You are like ourselves! You are no spirit, and we do not fear you. We are friendly! We will treat you well.”

But when the raven croaked again, “Azeezruk! Ca?” they all stepped back and whispered in awed tones. Gradually Waste was coming to understand that his friend, the raven, had much to do with his deliverance. “Must be some superstition about him,” he thought, as he was led away to the village.

But where was Elliot? He asked about him. At first, no one would admit any knowledge of him. At last one young fellow, braver than his companions, stepped out and said:

“Azeezruk! Muckie!” Waste understood nothing of this, but by signs they implied that the words meant, “Bad one. He is dead!”

Dead! Then the strange fellow had met his death here on the ocean's ice. After a

moment's reflection, the boy was not surprised. Elliot could never stand the strain of such an ordeal as he had just gone through. It was probable that he had attacked one of the natives and had been killed by his comrades. Though he questioned many of the natives, he learned no more of the details regarding the killing. One thing occurred which assured him that the man was dead. After he had eaten and slept, and eaten again, a native brought him a moose-hide sack, which was very heavy.

"Here is something that does n't belong to us," the man told him by signs. "And, anyway, I don't want it. My friends don't want it. We don't think it's any good. You can have it, if you think it is any good."

It was Elliot's sack of gold, worth two or three thousand dollars. Waste packed it on his sled and left it there, feeling quite sure that no natives would steal that which he and his friends thought was "no good."

It was Soolook's tribe that Waste Warren had come upon. It was Soolook himself who told of the death of Elliot. Perhaps it

was the very fact of his boldness that made Waste fear the Eskimo boy. But to that was added the Eskimo boy's seemingly unnatural interest in the talking raven. He hardly wished to allow the raven out of his sight. After Waste had been given a snow house of his own, he would often be awakened from a sound sleep to find Soolook staring in at the narrow half-circle which served as a door.

“What could it mean?” he asked himself many times. “Did the boy wish to steal the raven? Did he, like the mad miner, hate the raven and wish to kill it? Or was the Eskimo seeking a chance to kill him, that he might take his dog team and other belongings as his own?”

CHAPTER IX

WORK OF THE TIDE CRACK SPIRIT

IT was a strange life that Waste lived with these primitive people. Under the light of the circling moon, their white-domed houses cast dark shadows, and from shadow to shadow they flitted, these strange people of the North. Now a child brought a choice morsel from her mother's stone pot, and now another child returned the compliment with some seal hearts pickled in seal oil. So they lived. Together they feasted; together starved.

Waste killed for them with a magic of great noise, and his rifle, as long as there was open water for seals, added much to their larder.

But this odd world was not without its perils. White bears and wolves were quite as likely to be hungry as the man who hunted them. They were living over the rushing

currents of the ocean. This, too, had its perils, as a startling experience was destined to teach the boy.

And there came a time when real starvation threatened. The ice had closed in tight, leaving no holes of open water where seals might be found reveling in the moonlight. The white bears, too, seemed to have left this region. The only hunting was through the ice. This was done by sitting over a seal's breathing hole and harpooning him as he rose for air. But each seal kept several holes free from ice, and a hunter might sit by a hole hour after hour, with his back to the biting wind, only to return at last empty-handed.

Waste would gladly have returned to Macdonald's cabin and spared these new friends the trouble of feeding him and his dogs, but without a supply of food, he dared not begin the journey.

Since his rifle was useless in hunting the seal at this time, he one day laid it aside and went out armed with only a copper-pointed lance and a harpoon. He had done hunting

of this sort while with the Eskimo of the West Coast, and hoped, with good luck, at least to add his share to the failing larder.

That he might not interfere with the other hunters, he went far out over the straits, and there, believing himself to be quite alone, sat down on a convenient ice cake to watch a newly made seal hole. As he sat there, the silence seemed to close in about him. He was far from any members of his own race. He was among people who recognized no law save their own primitive rights and wrongs and customs, founded for the most part on superstitions. How easily he could pass into the great unknown! What would be told of his death? Nothing. A tide crack might lift the ice and the waters rise to engulf him. There would follow a few gulps of agony, and a dark object would float beneath the surface. Only yesterday he had received a shock, when on sounding with a sealskin rope and copper axe, he had found the water to have no bottom at a hundred fathoms.

As he pondered over these things, there came to him a new sense of loneliness.

But what was that? It seemed to him that he caught the notes of an Eskimo song, "I-I-yi-yum-ya." But as he rose and looked about, he saw only piles of ice and the purple shadows they cast. And if he had really heard the song, it had ceased.

"Only the wind," he whispered to himself, as he once more fixed his eyes on the seal hole.

But the seal did not come, and as the hours passed, he became drowsy. He might fall asleep. Well, what of that? He was warmly clothed and not at all exhausted. Under such conditions, one might sit with his back to the wind and weather a blizzard sound asleep quite as well as among the deerskins on the bed-shelf of a snug snow house.

He was nodding when the song seemed to come to him again, "I-I-um-ah-ah-ah." It sounded like a weird chant of the dead, coming as it did from among cemetery-like fields of white ice piles and up-ended cakes.

This time, as he stumbled hurriedly to his feet, he saw the Eskimo. And instantly, by the white eider-duck covering of his parka hood, he knew it to be Soolook.

A strange fear overcame Waste. Quickly gathering up his hunting material, he started straight away over the ice. He was not surprised that Soolook followed him. He had heard from many the customs of these people; how, when it has been decided that a member of the tribe has become a menace to the life of the tribe, another member is appointed to kill him. He suddenly became obsessed with the idea that this native had convinced his fellows that the presence of the white boy among them was bringing them to face famine, and had gotten himself appointed executioner.

They were alone. Only the silent moon would be witness to the tragedy. Waste was no match for this skillful hunter, when it came to lance and harpoon. His rifle was far away. Already, as he hurried over the ice, he seemed to feel the sharp agony of the harpoon point being driven into his tender flesh, then the last thrust of the lance.

Then, suddenly, he heard a shout from the pursuer. Then another and another. What could it mean? They seemed to be shouts

of warning in tones of alarm. Could he be wrong? Was some other danger threatening? Was this boy, after all, his friend? As he turned he saw the other wildly beckoning to him. But surely, this was but a trick to bring him more quickly to his destruction. He turned to hasten on, but as he looked again, the Eskimo stood still, and his gestures became more violent. And now he threw himself flat on the ice. Then, lifting his copper-bladed knife above his head, he hacked at the ice.

Suddenly Waste's heart stood still. On looking down at his feet, he saw that he stood upon the ice as one might stand upon the roof of a tent. The ice sagged down from every side.

Quickly dropping, stomach down, on the ice, he followed the example of the Eskimo. With the first blow his knife cut through, and water bubbled up. He put his ear to the ice and heard the waters of Union Straits bubbling and racing madly. A tide crack had torn away the solid winter's ice, and he was on that which had newly formed. At

any moment his dream of a little while ago might come true. For one long moment he lay there paralyzed. Then, gradually, power of locomotion came back to him. With lance shaft and harpoon held straight out before him, he began to crawl to where Soolook was still beckoning madly.

And as he crawled, it seemed to him that he was at the bottom of an immense bowl made of ice, that he would never reach the rim; but still he struggled on.

Soolook was creeping toward him. What could this be for? If they met, their combined weight would surely sink them. But the Eskimo was wise. He came only so far, then began backing slowly away. He was handy in case of accident, but not too close.

And now Waste had covered half the required distance, now two thirds; now, — now he had but twenty feet more to go. The ice where the Eskimo lay was quite solid.

Then there came a dull crack, and after that water gurgled over his limbs. With a stifled cry he felt himself being dragged down. But the shafts of his hunting instruments

arrested his plunge. These he gripped with a hand of despair.

The Eskimo was coming to his aid, and with great cleverness he had broken away a flat slab of old ice and was pushing it before him like a raft. When quite close to the boy he climbed upon it and propelled it forward, as one propels a raft in water. Soon the cake was only a foot from the white boy's head, and in another moment he felt himself being lifted upon the raft. The remainder was but the work of a few seconds. Panting and shivering, Waste lay upon the solid ice.

Dragging his water-soaked garments from him, his rescuer began to chafe his limbs. When circulation had been restored, he stripped his warm outer garments from himself and forced them upon the unwilling white boy. Then, garbed only in his thin undergarments of fawnskin, Soolook proceeded to march the boy back to camp.

It was a hard, wearisome journey. Exhausted as he was by the strain and chilled quite through, Waste would never have made camp by himself. But when he would beg

to be allowed to sit down and sleep, he was answered by the prod of the lance he had feared, only it was the blunt end.

At last he tumbled upon the deerskins in Soolook's snow house, and, after feeling a bowlful of hot seal blood and broth go gurgling down his throat, fell asleep to spend hours without end in happy dreams. And beside him sat Soolook, while above him, in grim silence, perched the talking raven.

From time to time Soolook gazed enraptured at the raven and murmured, "Adop-teta!" (Father.)

Many strange thoughts passed through the Eskimo boy's mind as he sat there. Often he had examined the soles of Waste's boots and marveled as he thought how like they must be to the ones that had made the footprints in the snow in the distant land of the Ooming-muck-suit. "Could this be the Kabluna?" he had asked himself many times. And always another question sprang into his mind, "How could a fierce Kabluna be friend of the Raven Father?"

CHAPTER X

HUNTERS HUNTED

WASTE's perilous dip in the ocean, though a source of momentary discomfort, proved a blessing in disguise. Soolook from this time on took an active part in preserving the life of the white stranger. He insisted that they hunt together. This did not displease Waste in the least, for every day he learned from the Eskimo some new feature of life on the roof of the ocean.

It was while on one of these trips that he had what was, perhaps, the crowning adventure that came to him during his visit.

The ice was still closely landlocked. Food was still very scarce. They had gone a greater distance than usual in the hopes of taking an oogrook (big seal) which would give them a greater supply of food.

Waste had been watching an air hole for

two hours and was becoming drowsy when, of a sudden, he thought he heard a strange sound behind him. It was like the angry spat of a cat, or the hiss of a goose. Turning, all alert, he found himself facing a great, gaunt, yellow-coated polar bear. In the moonlight he looked immense. And, as the boy stared, he realized that he *was* immense. His white ivory teeth shone in an expectant grin; his great neck seemed stretched abnormally, as he wagged his head slightly from side to side.

“He ’s hungry,” was Waste’s first mental comment. And that conclusion led to several others in quick succession. These white bears seldom see a man. They come from the great north fields of ice. “He will not fear me; he will think I’m to eat. I ’m no match for him with these copper-pointed tools. Oh, for my rifle! I ’m going to run for it!”

All these thoughts consumed but an instant of time, and the next second the boy was dashing away at full speed, lance and harpoon rattling at his side, and the great, gaunt creature lumbering after him.

And now, for the first time, he thought of Soolook. Where was he? He had hardly asked himself the question when he saw the Eskimo running, but running at such an angle that he would soon be joining the white boy.

His heart beat high with admiration, if not with hope. His companion was joining him in his distress. The two of them were no more a match for the beast than one would be. When the Eskimo people hunted the white bear they worked in groups with many lances, harpoons and dogs. But two men? And such a bear!

As the boy ran on, finding himself taking his pace from the Eskimo, hope came to his rescue. Perhaps Soolook could lead the bear to where other hunters were; then not only would they be saved, but the famine would be at an end.

This hope was short-lived, for on looking about, he nearly staggered with surprise. The bear, having doubled his pace, was hopping now like a jack rabbit, and it was only a question of time when he would be upon them.

Sprinting ahead, Waste was soon abreast of his companion. His face told the story. Soolook looked back; then he too sprinted. But Waste read in his eyes a new note of surprise.

“Wolves!” Waste exclaimed, as he too looked about.

Behind the bear yellowish-white streaks were casting moving shadows. There was a pack of them. Driven to the ice for food, they were hunting the bear. This was the reason for his jack-rabbit loping.

Here was a mix-up. What was to come of it all? Men, bear, wolves were all hungry. Who would go away fed?

But now Soolook was pointing out a plan. Waste studied his gestures. It did not seem to him possible that they could escape that way. Would not the wolf-pack set upon them? They might, but, anyway, it was their only chance. They were far from every other native and going farther.

As they neared a great pile of broken ice cakes, they slowed down a trifle, then glided directly to the right and into the shadows.

There, with lances lifted, they waited. In an instant a great white bulk flew straight past them. Again their nerves grew tense. It was the wolves they feared most. The bear was too intent upon escaping from the wolves to heed the actions of those he had been pursuing. But now, as they gripped their lances and watched with straining eyes, a yellow streak flew by. They breathed more easily. Another and another shot past them. Waste counted as they passed. He was sure there were sixteen. Great, gaunt fellows they were, and their jaws chop-chopped as they ran.

The boys sat down upon an ice cake and grinned at each other. When their breath came evenly again and their hearts beat more normally, they rose to go.

“Listen !” Soolook signed, placing his hand to his ear.

From the distance there came the unmistakable noise of battle. The wolves had overtaken the bear. It did not seem possible that these creatures could kill the untamed King of the North, yet Waste had heard many stories of just such fights as this one.

“Are you afraid?” Soolook signed.

Waste grinned.

“Hungry?” The Eskimo signaled.

Waste pressed his stomach.

“Tired?” The Eskimo appeared to sleep.

Waste shook his head.

The Eskimo boy, apparently satisfied, led the way over the course the animals had taken.

For an hour they walked rapidly over the smooth surface. The great bear had run a good race, but had lost. The noise of battle at first grew louder as they approached the spot, then grew fainter and fainter until it seemed a mere occasional snarl. What could have happened? Had the wolves conquered, and were they now tearing away at the huge body? Or had the bear broken from his tormentors and renewed the race for life? They would see.

Now the Eskimo stooped low as he scooted from shadow to shadow and from ice pile to ice pile. They were coming near to the scene of battle. As the low snarls no longer seemed distant and grew slightly louder as they ad-

vanced, they concluded that the wolves had won.

But what was the Eskimo's plan? He did not tell Waste, so the boy followed on, his eyes wide open, his ears alert, and, if the truth must be told, he kept in view, first this great ice pile then that one; for, he reasoned, if one were at the top of an ice pile, he would stand a fair chance against a number of wolves.

Stealthily they pushed on until from between two ice cakes they could see the pack. They were so crowded together that one could scarcely see the object on which they fed, but there could be no doubt as to its identity.

Pulling Waste to a seat beside him, the Eskimo indicated that they would wait. So they sat there in the moonlight. Aside from an occasional snarl, and the low, cracking, munching sound of the feast, no noise disturbed the silence of the vast whiteness, which the moon flooded with a soft light or painted with purple shadows.

But now Waste noted that one wolf slunk away from the carcass and disappeared;

another followed and still another. There is a limit even to the appetite of a hungry wolf. With sides bulging, they were creeping away to rest.

And now the Eskimo gripped his lance as if undecided on their next course. There were still five wolves feeding.

Another slipped off into the jumble of ice piles.

"Come on," signaled the Eskimo, slipping out from behind their cover.

The greedy wolves did not see the boys until they were quite upon them. Waste found himself all a-tremble with excitement, and in this excitement he did a thing which nearly cost him his life. Gripping his harpoon instead of his lance, he sent the shaft crashing into the ribs of a wolf. The point only pierced the skin and entered the flesh without reaching a vital part. The wolf turned with a snarl of pain and rage. Then Waste, losing all control of himself, gave a tug at the leather thong fastened to the harpoon point. This brought the beast at him with a fresh snarl. With eyes burning, mouth frothing, teeth

chop-chopping, Waste saw him come, and, staggering backward, fell over an ice cake. The fall saved him, for the beast leaped over him. The next instant there was the flash of a copper lance, and Soolook was to the rescue.

Waste sprang to his feet, and, securing his lance, accounted for one of the remaining wolves. Soolook had killed three to his one, but not content with that, he dashed into the shadows and soon returned with a fourth.

Then they sat down again and grinned. Fortune had come their way. Wolf meat was very good for both men and dogs. Counting the two killed by the bear, they had seven of these animals. There must be two or three hundred pounds of bear meat too. What a day for hunters !

But they were a long way from the white-domed village, so making a drag of a rawhide rope they prepared to haul one wolf carcass after them. They would send sleds for the rest of the meat. Famine was over for the present.

And, indeed, famine ended right there, for

only a few hours later a strong gale came from the shore. This, blowing the ice out to sea in many places, left plenty of open water for hunting.

And now, since all was well with his toilers on the sea, Waste decided to make his way back to the trapper's cabin. As he sat thinking of it, before he slept his last sleep in a snow house, he realized that there were many problems to be solved. He could not take enough food for the entire journey; he must depend upon his success at hunting for part. Elliot had been a poor companion, but now he had none at all. Then there was Elliot's death. Would his friends believe his report? And what should be done with the sack of gold?

In the midst of all these problems, the boy tumbled down among the deerskins and fell asleep.

Eight hours later he was on his way. Shouting to his dogs, he went spinning away over the ice. He had packed his sled carefully, yet his mind was ill at ease. It seemed to him that he must have left something be-

hind. What could it be? He had left the ocean's ice and gone plunging away over the jagged ice of the river, when it came to him with a start:

"The raven!" he exclaimed. "I forgot the talking raven!"

Stopping his team he paused a moment in thought, then, throwing back his head, he laughed.

"That Eskimo boy always liked the raven. I'll bet he held on to him when I left," he chuckled. "Oh, well, if he wants to come with me, he'll come all right. And if he does n't, what's one raven more or less?"

With that he spoke to his dogs and went spinning away.

CHAPTER XI

“MOUNTIES”

WASTE stared as he struggled along through the snow. Six inches of snow, hard and fine as granulated sugar, had impeded his travel for twelve long hours. The two days before that he had spent behind a cut-bank, weathering a blizzard. The blizzard had left this wide expanse of impassable snow.

He was worried. There was no food on his sled. Already his supply of seal meat was exhausted, and he was not halfway to Macdonald's cabin. Not so much as a snowshoe rabbit had crossed his trail. The dogs were hungry, and so was he.

But what was this he saw, as he neared the forest that skirted the lake? Could it be that tribes of Indians had come to hunt in this part of the forest? Macdonald had said they never came here in winter. And yet,

there was a slender column of vapor rising high above the tree tops. Yes, and there was another and another. Surely, this was smoke. What could it mean? Had some strange tribe of Eskimo left the ocean during the starving time and come here to hunt? Did he want to meet them? He did not. His experience with the others had been happy enough, but now he was headed for the land of white men.

Presently, as he came closer, he was certain that these could not be camp fires. There were too many of them. Were the woods on fire? For a second his heart stood still. Then he realized that this could not be possible. It was mysterious, almost uncanny. The air was still, a feather might fall through it straight to the ground. All was quiet as a Sabbath morning. It was cold, too; he thought he had never known it so cold.

And then, chancing to glance up, he laughed aloud. Stretching far up toward the clouds was a column of vapor rising from himself and from his dogs. The air was so still and so cold that their very breath rose straight

above them like smoke. Joy leaped in his heart, for the columns of vapor meant that there were wild creatures in the forest, probably caribou, and if success crowned his efforts, he would have a splendid feast before he slept.

In another half-hour the dog team plunged into the forest. Once he was there, the boy could scarcely believe his ears; for all about him came the crash and snap of caribou making their way among the bushes and trees. He seized his rifle and stood with hammer raised, expecting at any moment to see one of the creatures break through the spruce boughs just ahead of him. But when he had stood there for ten minutes, until his hands became numb with the cold, he concluded that he had been deceived again. And this conclusion proved to be correct. In this death-still, frozen-empty Arctic atmosphere sound travels distinctly and far.

Waste realized the truth of this with a new emphasis when, having tied up his dogs, who were whining to be away after the caribou, he attempted to stalk the game. The caribou

could hear his footsteps quite as easily as he could hear theirs. After he had hunted for an hour without catching sight of one of the brown-coated creatures, he was ready to despair.

But as he watched the little white columns moving about above the trees, he noticed that the caribou were all going in a northerly direction.

“If I can skirt this neck of woods and find some rocky point, I can lay for them,” he told himself.

Hastening away around the point, he came finally to a likely place, where he concealed himself in a small spruce tree.

His heart beat high when he saw the white columns drifting closer and closer. At last he drew off a deerskin mitten and waited.

There appeared in the opening before him a splendid antlered creature, then another smaller one. Sighting carefully, he fired; then, jumping from the tree, he fired rapidly twice again. As he ran forward, he found the larger caribou where he had fallen in his track, and a short distance away was the smaller one.

It was a wonderful feast he had two hours later. With the dogs grouped around him, with the smoke of a real fire rising up, up, up till it lost itself in the eternal blue, he sat long and ate slowly the rich red roast of deer meat. The seal and walrus and white bear of the ocean furnish food that one may eat to sustain life, but the caribou steak is a thing to dream of on lonely winter nights.

The fire had burned down to a bed of glowing coals, and Waste was just thinking of sleep when, mingled with the sound of caribou still crashing through the forest came another sound, — a sound quite foreign to an Arctic wilderness. At first, it was faint like the noise of a waterfall; but as it came nearer, it became the tinkle of bells.

“Santa Claus, I ’ll be bound !” grinned the boy.

He was sure now that some one was passing through the forest with a dog team, and from the bells he judged them to be white men.

“Must be that Macdonald and Swen thought I was lost for good and have started

out to meet me,” he said to his dogs. “Well, I ’ll have to try to head ’em off.”

With that, after listening to the sound for a moment, he struck off to the right of his camp.

He had traveled for perhaps a mile, having often stopped to listen, when he concluded that he was directly in the course which the sled was taking. Then he stood still with heart beating wild in expectation.

Imagine his surprise upon seeing plunge from among the spruce trees not his two friends of the cabin, but two members of the Canadian Mounted Police force.

“Police! And in such a spot!” he murmured. “What in time?”

The men, catching sight of him, drove directly to him.

“Where ’s your partner?” asked the taller of the two, who appeared to be in command.

“Over at Macdonald’s cabin, I hope. That ’s where I left him two months ago,” Waste smiled.

“Macdonald’s cabin?” The police said the words slowly, looking with a sharp eye

meanwhile. "He ain't been at the cabin since you left."

Waste's heart sank. Swen not at the cabin; not there since he left? What could have happened to him? Certainly, this was hard luck indeed. To his mind's vision came the picture of the golden-haired girl, Swen's sister, and his heart reproached him for leading the splendid fellow into this awful wilderness.

"Why—why," he stammered, "I don't see what could have happened to him. He was there when I left."

"Now see here, son!" The man's tone was cold and hard. "We've come a long way for that man, and we ain't goin' home without him. That ain't the way the Mounted Police do things. If he's told you a yarn and bribed you into hidin' him out by givin' you half his gold, you might as well own up and produce him, for we'll take him or you. Mark that!"

Waste's mind was in a whirl. They had come for Swen! Swen, who was as tender-hearted as a child, and honest as Old Abe!

Something must be wrong. He thought for a moment, then a smile broke forth on his face.

“Oh !” he exclaimed, “you’re talking about Elliot?”

“That’s what he called himself.”

“He’s dead.”

“Dead?”

“Yes, the Eskimo killed him when we first came upon the ice. He didn’t understand them, I guess, and I think he attacked them. I wasn’t close to him, but anyway, he’s dead.”

“Now, look here,” said the leader, looking the boy in the eye, “if you’re stringin’ us — if you’re hidin’ him out to get some of his gold — it’ll go hard with you.”

“Oh! If it’s the gold you want,” smiled Waste light-heartedly, “you’re welcome to it; I’ve got it over on my sled. The Eskimo brought it to me; said they didn’t think it was good for anything.”

The men turned their team about and followed Waste to his camp beneath the spruce boughs.

“Humph! Something round here smells good! Got a caribou, I bet. We’re hungry’s

a bear. Can you spare us a steak? We 'll talk business later."

The men had coffee in their kit, and when, after a feast of broiled steak and hot coffee, they sat down to talk, they were indeed in a mellow mood.

Waste produced the sack of gold. After examining its contents, the tall man set it against a tree. Then he told how this man had gone with his partner into the enchanted wilderness to hunt gold; how they had jumped a well-marked claim far up the Hare Indian River and had mined rich gold until winter froze them in, and then, for the gold, Elliot had murdered his partner.

"But how did you find all this out?" asked Waste.

"Elliot's partner had a pet bird, a talking raven. He flew back to the fort after the partner was killed, and that's how we got the idea of foul play and ferreted it out. But the bird disappeared."

As they sat looking into the fire, there came a sudden rustle among the branches, and a raucous voice exclaimed:

“Azeezruk ! Ca ?”

The tall man jumped.

“That ’s him !” he exclaimed, as if he had listened to a ghost. “Them ’s the very words he used to say ! Eskimo words they are.”

Then Waste, in his turn, told of his adventures with Elliot and the talking raven.

“That gold,” said the tall man meditatively, when they had sat by the fire in silence again for some time, “it ’ll have to go back to the fort, and then we ’ll have to try to find the rightful owners — the fellows that own the claim.”

Waste started. An old, half-forgotten idea had come to him.

“Say !” he exclaimed, “was that claim far up the extreme right fork of the Hare Indian River, up beyond two or three rapids, where the stream ain’t much more than a brook ?”

“Yes, sir, that ’s where.”

“And was it staked with green spruce boughs that were blazed on the lower side and marked with a blue pencil ‘W and P’ ?”

“Yes, sir, that ’s just it,” said the tall man, staring at him.

"Then that 's the claim Swen and I worked last fall and were going back to next summer!"

"Guess you 're right, son. Could n't nobody prove up property like that unless they 'd been there, and nobody 's been there except us and the jumpers that 's dead and the original owners. And the gold belongs to you and your partner."

"But I suppose — suppose it 'll have to be proved. I 'll have to go to the fort just the same?"

"Not 's I know of," said the other, shoving the sack toward the boy. "Up here in the North we ain't much on red tape. Right 's right, and when we see it, that 's enough. Glad we could help you."

"Thanks!" Waste's heart was full. Here was fortune indeed! They had the gold Swen needed to make his sister comfortable and to give Waste his education. Now, if they could only get "outside", all would be well.

Two weeks after Waste arrived at camp, Macdonald announced his intention of returning south. He had a herd of cattle that he pastured in the rich valleys of Northern

Canada, and he must get back and bring them up from their stables.

He invited the boys to join him, but though Waste felt that the “pocket” to their mine had been tapped by Elliot and his partner, Swen was for returning for another look at it, and he at last prevailed. The dangerous season was past. Already the days were longer than the nights. Caribou and game birds were passing northward. With a compass, rifles, and ammunition they could travel anywhere in safety. These articles were freely supplied by Macdonald, and they were soon on their way.

Waste’s theory proved the correct one; the mine contained no more valuable digging.

Now that they were back on the headwaters of the MacKenzie, they decided to build themselves a raft of spruce logs and float down to the main river where they might hope to catch a steamer.

It was while they were engaged in building the raft that, on climbing a promontory, Waste’s eyes beheld a strange sight. Down in a grassy spot, half overgrown with willows,

were five hundred or more creatures quietly feeding. The color and size of them puzzled him. They were not caribou, for caribou were always brown. Some of these were white, some brown, some spotted.

“Reindeer!” he exclaimed. “Reindeer, I’ll be bound! And here in this wilderness! Five hundred at least! Must have wandered away from some large Alaskan herd and traveled all this distance. Some worried Eskimo is hunting them at this moment. Much luck he’ll have! They’re a thousand miles from their base.”

“That means that one of us will have to stay and watch ’em,” he told Swen that night. “There’s at least ten thousand dollars’ worth of ’em, and we’d be awful pikers if we went and left them. One of these dogs Macdonald left us is a collie. He’ll do for a herder. You go on the raft, and I’ll stay. You send an Eskimo to take charge of them as soon as you can. What do you say?”

Swen gave reluctant assent to this plan, and a week later Waste found himself in the midst of an uncharted wilderness with a

single collie dog as companion and a reindeer herd as his ward.

“It will be months before they can come,” he told the collie as they sat by the camp fire. “But we ’ll have plenty of reindeer meat, and it ’s going to be great sport.”

The dog wagged his tail for answer. Then suddenly he sprang up. Nostrils dilated, hair bristling, he leaped into the brush.

“Azeezruk! Ca?” came in raucous tones from a near-by bush.

Waste threw back his head and laughed.

“Come on back,” he called to the dog. “It ’s only our ancient friend, the talking raven, who seems to know all that ’s good from all that ’s bad. He ’s come back to make us a visit. I lost him two months ago. I call his return a sign of good luck.”

The dog crept back to his place at the boy’s feet, but kept one eye cocked toward the bush where poised the black bird.

“I wonder,” Waste said thoughtfully, addressing the raven, “I do wonder if I ’ll ever see that strange, wild boy, Soolook, again? He was a queer chap, but a mighty good pal.

He had a funny way of almost worshiping you, raven."

The raven tipped his head on one side and plumed his one white feather, as he mumbled:

"Nagoovaruk! Ca?"

CHAPTER XII

SOOLOOK TAKES THE SOUTHERN TRAIL

SOOLOOK's eyes shone, his whip cracked, his feet came down with a smart spat, spat on the crusted snow. Every atom of his being was alive through and through. He had been on a long hunt, but on his sled there lay no game. What mattered that? Was there not food a-plenty at the igloos? And was it not spring? It was night now, but he had traveled through six hours of wonderful sunlight. And truly, in a land where night reigns for months, the new-born day is fresher and fairer than any seen or felt by other lands.

But as the boy sped on his face clouded. Many things troubled and puzzled him. He had attempted to retain the Raven Father when the young stranger had left the tribe, but in this he had failed. The wary old bird had left him and had not returned. This had

thrown him once more out of the class of great shamins. These days he was being treated as a very ordinary boy might be treated. Indeed, it seemed that many members of the tribe were bent upon heaping indignities on his head. Many menial tasks were given him to do.

But these things did not trouble him so much. It was the great problem of the Kabluna which interested and puzzled him more than ever. He had seen strangers who in many ways were like the fabled ones, yet in many ways were dissimilar. And not knowing their language, he could not ask them if they were the Kabluna, and, if not, whether they had seen the Kabluna at any time. Now, with the call of spring, seemed to come a challenge to go in search of the Raven Father and the true Kabluna.

Then, suddenly, he remembered something, and his brow grew darker. This was the night of the beginning of the great five-day festival, — the Bladder Festival, greatest of the year. All the bladders of all the seals, walrus and polar bears killed during the year

had been carefully saved. They represented the spirits of the animals killed. Now these spirits were to be honored. The bladders would be fastened to the inner roof of a new igloo. In that igloo wild-parsnip stalks, carefully dried and preserved, would be burned. The smoke would be sweet to the spirits. Water would be poured on the floor that they might drink. Meat would be set before them that they might eat. While one member of the tribe watched that not one bladder might be molested, or allowed to fall from its place, other members of the tribe in their own igloos would feast and dance, singing songs of the spirits. At the end of five days all the bladders would be taken to a hole in the ocean's ice, where the current would carry them away, that they might return to their own.

The time was when the boy would have welcomed this celebration, but in these days he felt keenly the call of the out-of-doors. And now he dismissed all these thoughts and, shouting, sent his dog-leader spinning away at redoubled speed. He must not be too late for the festival; besides, he was hungry, and

there was to be a feast. Always there was stuffed tail of white whale, heart of polar bear, dried caribou steak, and pickled walrus liver, spiced with blueberries and bitter willow leaves.

But what was this? At the door of the new igloo where the bladders hung, he was halted by an angry witch-doctor. The shamin had witched, and the spirits had decreed that he, Soolook, should be watcher over the bladders. Already he was very late, and the shamin had been waiting.

With drooping head and listless eyes, the boy threw his whip on the ground and, without unhitching the dogs, bent low and entered the igloo. There on the bed-shelf, on a single deerskin, he crossed his legs and sat alone.

The igloo was a vile place, contrasting strangely with the keen, fresh out-of-doors. It was too late in the year for snow domes. The walls were of snow; the roof of sagging walrus hide. The air was reeking with bladder smell and raw-skin smells. A flickering seal-oil lamp filled the room with suffocating smoke. And above all else, Soolook was both sleepy and hungry.

Hours passed, and as they passed, his head drooped lower and lower. At last he seemed to start up. The room was suddenly filled with great, gaunt animals, — walrus, polar bears, seals seemed to pass and repass. Dim ghosts they were; mere spirit beings, they appeared to leer at him, the walrus lifting their terrible mustaches, and the bears craning their outlandish necks. But now there entered another creature. He seemed black and substantial. No spirit was this, but a monstrous fierce dog. He dashed at the spirits, and, rearing on haunches, seized them and dragged them all after him, as if they were tied together by a thong. He disappeared through the opening, dragging the shades after him. With a start Soolook awoke.

He had been dreaming. But how was this? He rubbed his eyes and looked again. The bladders were gone. With a cry of despair he sprang for the door. The spirits had existed only in his dream. The dog was a reality, for was he not even now dashing away with the bundle of bladders tight gripped in his teeth?

With sinking heart, the boy leaped upon his sled and cracked his whip. His team was fleet, but not fleet enough to catch a single dog that carried only a feather's weight of dried bladders.

At last he dug his heels in the snow and the sled stopped. What new tragedy had he brought down upon himself and his tribe? Were the bladders not recovered, their spirits would bring an evil report of this tribe, and no animals would come to their hunting grounds, and there would be a terrible starving time. So said the old shamin. Soolook did not believe it. Bah! These were old men's fables. But the people would be serious about it; might even kill him for it.

Suddenly, as he stood there, into his mind there came again a call, — the call of the Kabluna. His face turned to the south. A moment he stood there irresolute. His hunting tools were on his sled; his dogs were in prime condition. He would go. With eyes showing a new light, he turned his sled toward the point where the sun shone at midday and went spinning away.

By morning of the next day he had reached the shore where the great river fretted beneath its melting prison of ice. Here he captured a seal, on which he and his pack feasted. Then, beneath a cut-bank, they slept.

In the journey southward, as long as they followed the winding course of the river, as long as the sloping land faced to the north, they were in a region that was known to him; and its hiding places beneath rocky banks or squat, scrubby spruce yielded food in abundance. But once they had crossed the divide and gone plunging down into unknown forests, where towering pines cast dark shadows, and strange thorny bushes tore at garments and made sledding impossible, then they found themselves in a land where wild things were strange to him. The knowledge of tundra and sea is not the knowledge of southland forest. Even the fish were different. They lay sparkling at the bottom of limpid pools, but did not rise to the boy's barbless hook, above which were strung red scales from a sea-fowl's leg. He needed fresh bait or flies, and what did this boy know of these? Insects

he came to know to his sorrow, for mosquitoes and gnats swarmed by the millions, making day a nightmare and sleep an impossibility.

Finally the famished dogs came upon the scent of some large creature. It proved to be a bear. He was black and not half the size of the monarch of the sea. "Easy meat," so thought the dogs. But they found to their consternation that this creature had teeth and claws such as they had never known before; and as for hugging, two dogs never lived to tell of it. At last the boy and the three remaining dogs slunk away, glad to escape with their lives.

Heat and rain added to their discomforts. The sun shone constantly. Soolook's skin garments became impossible things of sodden, ragged fur. But still they pushed on, until at last, with one more dog gone, the boy reached a spot where the forest ended, and a wide, sweeping, grassy valley lay before them. With a great sigh of relief and thanksgiving, he sank down beneath the last tree. A herd of some strange creatures wandered over the valley. As they fed closer to him,

he saw that they were not Oo-ming-muck-suit, nor were they caribou. Their legs were too long for Oo-ming-muck-suit, yet they did not have the towering antlers of a caribou. Whatever these creatures were, he decided that, by careful stalking, he and his two dogs might secure a calf, or a yearling, and then their fast would be over.

The task of creeping down the hillside and through the tall grass of the lowland was a difficult one. But with the dogs whining low and sagging at their tie-ropes, the boy made his way forward to a vantage point. And there he lay, panting with anticipation. The excitement of the hunt was upon him. Hunger, fatigue, lacerated skin were all forgotten. Here was a new, strange, wild thing to conquer, and this time he *would* conquer.

And now the moment had come, for, wandering near them, was a short-horned creature, very evidently a yearling. With lance poised for a throw, the boy rose to his knees. It was an easy cast. Yet he must not miss, for once the stampede was started their dinner was lost, and death by starvation was already

beckoning. The two dogs shared the excitement. They ceased to whine, but stood with lolling tongues and grinning lips, waiting. Now the boy rose suddenly to his feet and swung his arm back straight and strong.

But at that second there came a roar from behind him. It was the roar of a human voice. The lance fell with a dull thud upon the grass.

A man — a tall, muscular man — advanced toward him. On his face was written surprise, but neither fear nor anger. He looked the boy up and down, taking in every skin-wrapped bone, every bruise, every mosquito bite. Then he looked at the cadaverous dogs. After that he scratched his head and murmured:

“Well, I ’ll be jiggered!”

The man was Macdonald. Soolook was led away to a cabin hid by pine trees. His mind was in a whirl. How was it that a man stopped another from killing a wild thing, — an animal created to be man’s food, and which offered many a juicy steak, he was sure? After long puzzling he at last decided that among this strange people these horned

caribou were taboo for food, and that too was the reason they had not stampeded at sound of the human roar.

He and his dogs were fed sparingly of strong broth. Then, with his shreds of garments laid aside, he was buried beneath strange covers and was soon asleep.

To Macdonald, who had discovered this patch of nature's pasture and had driven his herd of cattle here for the summer, the Eskimo boy in all his rags was familiar and welcome. But how had he covered those hundreds of miles? And why? He scratched his head and muttered:

"He 'd have got that yearling bull of mine sure, if I had n't stopped him. Bet he thought the cattle was wild things!"

After that he dug into a duffel bag and dragged out shirt, socks, shoes and overalls.

"They 're miles too big, but they 'll be better 'n them skins," he muttered, as he threw them beside the cot where the boy slept.

The days which followed were strange magic to the Eskimo boy; the light that burned in a bowl of charmed, unmelting ice; the fire

that crackled in the strange black box; and most of all, the food mixed with powders and liquids in boxes puzzled him. Surely, this stranger was a man of great magic. His food was good. It made Soolook strong.

If it were a strange experience for the boy, so it was for his dog leader. When he had grown strong again, one day, as he lay lolling in the sun, there suddenly came to this dog the call of a hunt he had never finished. Straight away he hurried to the pasture of the horned caribou. Hours later he returned, dragging himself miserably over the ground. A great bull had stepped between him and a fat calf, and with many a roar tossed him high again and again. When he recovered from this assault, he quarreled with a great yellow dog, and was soundly thrashed, but not killed and eaten, as he surely would have been in the land of the wild. Yes, this land contained strange magic for Eskimo boys and dogs.

When Soolook had gained strength again, he was taken into the forest. He could not speak the language of the stranger, nor could that man speak his; yet by signs and symbols

he learned the habits and hiding places of the strange wild things. And soon, while Macdonald was tending the herd, Soolook was securing meat for the table. Three strange, wild caribou-like creatures fell before the roar of his magic killer. He tanned their skins, after the manner of his people, and with their sinew as thread, sewed them into garments for winter. Then one day he came upon signs of the terrible black bear that had crushed two of his team. Without food or sleep, for two days he followed this trail, and when on the third day he came up with the creature, a battle followed. At its close, the boy dragged behind him a black-furred hide and carried on his back a liberal portion of bear steak. The skin was tanned for a sleeping-robe.

But of all the mysteries, the herd of horned caribou puzzled the boy most. Why were they watched so carefully? If they were taboo, could not be killed and eaten, why guard them with such care? He was none the less puzzled when a second stranger appeared and, stacking jingling disks of metal

on the table, departed, taking the herd with him.

What were these disks? Were they things of terrible magic? Soolook feared them; could not be tempted to touch them. And his surmises were supported by the fact that Macdonald slept now with many a sudden start and clawing out at the moose-hide sacks of disks which were placed near the head of his bed. Soolook took to dreaming of the terrible magic which might spring from these disks. They were yellow like fire. Perhaps the earth would burn. They were yellow and round like the moon; perhaps he and Macdonald would take spirit-flight to the moon. So he dreamed, and in the meantime winter came down, the snow packed hard, and Soolook, having made a sled, harnessed his two Eskimo dogs and three collies to go spinning over the crust. This pleased Macdonald, and soon it became evident that he was packing for a journey.

The trail they took led them first to the south. Though the Eskimo boy trembled at the mere thought of advancing farther into

this strange land, his love for this new friend drew him on. Down through the meadows, then into a deep forest he traveled, Macdonald always at the lead, breaking trail for the dogs. He carried the magic killer, which Soolook had learned to call a "rifle", and always his eyes roved from right to left, then from left to right.

It was night when they came to a place where the forest parted and a narrow, snow-covered valley lay before them. Then it was that an ear-splitting screech broke upon the ears of Soolook. Not among the Indians from the Land of Little Sticks, not from the throats of any wild thing, had he ever heard a screech half so loud or half so piercing as this. He stood stock-still in his wild terror. His hair prickled, as if cold frost was in it. The sled and Macdonald passed on down the trail, but he stood there, for the first time in his life paralyzed with fear.

And, as he listened, it came again. Wilder, more terrible, it seemed to pierce his ear drums and enter his very soul. He half-turned to fly, when his very muscles seemed to turn to

stone. Before him, far down the valley, but approaching rapidly with a rumbling tread, was some giant creature. He could judge its size only by its rumbling tread and one thing more — one terrible thing — a single eye which glared and glowed and burned itself into the very depths of his being.

Then, with one wild wrench, he brought all his muscles into play and with a scream of terror, "The Kabluna!" he flew back over the trail.

Running at first with no reason to guide him, he covered great stretches of white trail. But in time, reason having partially returned, he struck the long, untiring gait of an Eskimo runner.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "though the Kabluna is so great and terrible, he is not a fast runner. I may yet escape."

So he ran the whole night through. When morning dawned he crept away under a rocky cliff that he might escape the gaze of that terrible single eye.

He fell asleep but was awakened at last by something damp touching his hand. He

started in terror. But when he saw it was only one of the stranger's yellow dogs, he laughed with joy, then sighed with sorrow over the loss of his friend.

“So,” he said to the dog, “you and I are the only ones who escaped alive!”

CHAPTER XIII

STRANGE MAGIC

ALL day Soolook lay shivering on the rocky shelf with the collie dog curled up beside him. He had been particularly fond of this collie. Now a new bond held them together. They were like two wild things on a river raft.

At times Soolook felt a strong impulse to retrace his steps to determine the fate of his friend. "Perhaps," he told himself, "there is still hope. It may be that he is not dead."

But as the night began to fall and every shadow seemed a wavering spirit-monster, his heart failed him. Finally he turned his face toward the upward trail and continued his journey from the land of the terrible voice and the more terrible eye. He had not gone far before he began to note that the rocks, the tree clumps, the bends in the trail and the river were all unfamiliar to him. After pon-

dering these matters for a long time, he was forced to the conclusion that in his mad rush of yesterday he had taken a wrong fork of the stream, and that he was now journeying over a territory entirely new to him.

But this did not altogether discourage him. During the summer, he had learned the ways of the wild creatures in this new wilderness. He did not fear but that he should do well enough at making a shift at a living here. In the pockets of his skin trousers were some steel nails and a double-bladed clasp knife. Though he had no rifle, he would soon have weapons for defense and hunting. One blade from the clasp knife would serve as a point to a lance. The steel nails he would beat out thin and sharpen for arrow points. Sooner or later he would come upon a beaver dam. He would drive the beavers into their houses, stop up their doors, and dig them out. The sinew from their strong tails would furnish string for a bow. Then his outfit would be complete.

During the night he snared two rabbits. He and the dog ate these raw, then hurried

on. So began his journey back to the land of his own people. Yes, he would go back. Trusting that time would blot out the memory of other days, he thought only of the marvelous tales he would have to tell. None of the great shamins of the tribe had seen the Kabluna save in spirit flight, and not all these who had sought him thus had returned to tell of their adventures, — but he, Soolook, had he not seen the Kabluna? Ah, yes, — he would tell of wonderful things.

For many days his life was a repetition of that he had always lived. Sometimes a rabbit, sometimes a partridge made his meal. At other times it was a fox or a gray timber wolf. Once he snared a wapiti and lived for days on its meat. Again, as he crossed a rocky ridge, he spied a mountain goat and devoted many hours to its stalking. In time a swift arrow found its mark, and he had goat's meat for dinner.

It was on one of these foraging expeditions, or rather a part of this great foraging expedition, which, indeed, his entire journey was, that he had climbed a snowy ridge to survey

the horizon, when something strange attracted his attention. At first he thought it a drove of the horned creatures such as Macdonald had herded. They were white, brown and spotted, as those other creatures had been. But on working his way closer to them, he discovered that they bore aloft the great scraggy antlers of the caribou tribe.

“Caribou!” he whispered to his yellow dog. “Now we shall have a feast indeed!”

The fact that these creatures had coats of many colors at first puzzled him. Then he remembered once to have seen three white and four spotted caribou in a great herd, and this reassured him.

Creeping down the ridge toward them, he flanked a group of willows and came out behind a rocky ridge where the valley was narrow. The herd was feeding up this valley, would soon be passing within arrow shot, and the wind was favorable. He sat down on the flat surface of a rock, drooped into a position of relaxation and repose, and waited.

But fortune seemed to turn against him. The wind veered suddenly and wafted his

scent directly toward the quiet herd. Surely now the old bulls would grow restless. They would stamp their hoofs on the hard snow. The herd would listen. They would trumpet forth a warning and a challenge; then the herd would go dashing away. Soolook and the dog would feed on rabbit that night, and even the dog had refused to touch rabbit.

But what was this? There came no stamping of hoofs, no trumpeted challenge. There was not even the lifting of a head.

This was strange indeed. Soolook found the thing displeasing. There was no glory in a kill where no strategy was needed. And besides, this was too much like the actions of Macdonald's horned caribou. He almost felt that he might look to see Macdonald coming down through the valley with his collie dogs.

Dogs? What was that he heard now? Was it a wolf? Strange noises for a wolf! It was a dog. Now he saw it plainly as it emerged from a willow thicket, barking as it ran. And there too was a man!

Soolook's senses reeled. "Must be I have

been too much alone," he mumbled to himself. But no, his eyes and ears did not deceive him. It was a herd of caribou, a dog and a man; and though the man was in plain sight, and the dog barked incessantly, the caribou did not shake their antlers, crook their necks or flee.

"Foolish caribou!" he murmured, as he prepared his arrow.

The whole herd was now in motion and would be passing him soon. But they did not move rapidly. The dog continued to bark. The man was advancing toward them. It was strange.

The foremost caribou was well within range of the powerful bow. The bow was bent for the shot, when like a flash came into the boy's mind a picture like this one, only the scenery was different; there were trees and rocks, while here was only ice and snow. And the creatures of the herd had horns instead of antlers. Again he heard Macdonald's wild shout of warning.

Some way, in his confused brain, there came the realization that through some strange

magic of a great potency, a whole herd of caribou had been made to do the bidding of a man and a dog. At any rate, he would see, — yes, even at the risk of being forced back to his diet of rabbit's meat.

Replacing the arrow in his quiver, he waited until the last caribou had passed, until the man was walking before him. Then, with startling suddenness, he let forth a wild shout of joy. There had been a puzzling familiarity about the gait of the man and the manner in which he wore his skin parka. Soolook had now recognized him as the one who had visited his tribe, bringing with him the long-lost Raven Father.

And it was indeed the Waste Warren of other days. The creatures were not caribou but reindeer, — the reindeer herd he had elected to watch until an Eskimo from Alaska would come to relieve him from the responsibility. No Eskimo had yet come. He had watched the herd the summer through and had prevented them from wandering far. He was now living in a "hogan" built of willow brush, and was at this moment

engaged in his daily task of driving the herd to the vicinity of his "hogan", from whence they would again feed out, but not too far, each day.

It was a joyous reunion. Especially glad was Waste to see his old pal of the Arctic ice. He had been lonely; and besides, might he not now hope, with the aid this wild boy and his collie dog, to begin the long drive which would bring the herd back to its rightful owner?

As for Soolook, the control of the herd was due to a great magic, and he had formed a strong resolve to discover the secret of this wonderful power that he might use it on the herds of brown caribou which passed through the hunting grounds of his people in autumn, — hundreds and hundreds of thousands. And if he learned the secret, would he not become the one great person of his tribe, — the shamin whom every other shamin fears?

And that night the secret came to him. The stranger had a black draught which he made by putting a handful of brown grains into a pot of water and boiling them. When

the water came away, it was black as night. Into this black draught, when it had been poured into a cup to cool, he dropped two white cubes. These cubes made it no whiter. Soolook watched with eagerness while the stranger stirred the potion with an oddly shaped metal affair.

“Will he drink it?” he kept asking himself, “or will he pour it upon the ground that the spirits of all dead caribou may drink of it and go away to tell all live caribou to do the bidding of the stranger?”

He counted the times Waste stirred it: seven times from right to left, nine from left to right. Seven and nine, he must not forget that; it was doubtless part of the magic.

Then Waste put the cup to his lips and sipped it gingerly. After that he drank half of it. Then, remembering his guest, he poured a second cup, and offered it to Soolook with the two white cubes. In a wild panic of terror, the boy refused. He dared not drink it. What power lay in that cup he could not tell. Perhaps, since he was an Eskimo, it might lift him through the roof and carry

him away to the moon. No, indeed, he would not drink it. But the two white cubes he wrapped carefully in a bit of oiled skin. So much of the magic formula was his. Could he but get some of the brown grains, the thing would be complete; the vast droves of caribou would be within his power. And as he thought of those herds that, passing by on either side of a hill, made the whole world seem a sea of brown, he felt sorry for Waste, who watched but five hundred creatures, when he might be herding more than man can count.

Ten days Soolook remained with Waste. In that time he learned many things: how to lasso, rope and harness a sled-deer; how to direct his dog in rounding up the herd; how to prevent the herd from stampeding by singing cheerfully when they seemed restless and disturbed. Many more things he learned about the handling of these creatures of the tundra. Only one thing more did he learn about the black draught: one did not always stir it seven times from right to left and nine from left to right. He might stir it six and four, or eight and fourteen. When one was

in haste, he stirred it little. When he was quiet and at rest, he stirred it many times. This puzzled him, but he concluded at last that it was not important. The one great and important feature was to secure some of the dark brown grains.

Finally, with wildly beating heart, he indicated to Waste that he would like some of the grains. Waste, though the can was nearly empty, and though he knew it would be long before he might obtain more, gave it to him, and watched him as he wrapped it carefully in oiled skin of a ground squirrel. Then he smiled. He had given this present to the boy because soon he hoped to impart to him by the sign language that he wished him to go with him on a long journey to a strange land.

“But what,” he asked himself, “does this wild boy want with the coffee? He steadfastly refuses to drink from the cup, yet he desires the grains and received them with many bows of thanks. This is strange!”

The next morning, when Waste awoke, Soolook was gone. When he had waited three

days for his return, he gave up his fond dream of immediate relief from exile and settled down to await the coming of an Eskimo from the Alaskan herds.

As for Soolook, blissfully ignorant of the fact that Waste had been sorely disappointed, he was hastening away over hills and tundra, his one thought to come in contact with the great herds that would be passing south soon to their winter feeding grounds.

It was on the evening of the third day that he heard the distant crock-crock of caribou hoofs. And now he was puzzled. The black draught must be hot when he drank it, but if he paused long enough to make a fire, the caribou might pass him by. No matter; he must risk it. Hastily gathering dry moss and willow branches, he lighted a fire. A half hour after, he stood by his fire, a steaming black draught in his musk-ox-horn cup. Slowly dropping in the cubes, he stirred it seven times one way, nine the other; then with a little gasp, he put the cup to his lips. The taste of it was both bitter and sweet.

“Ah-ne-ca!” He had tasted it, and noth-

ing terrible had happened. Hastily he gulped it down, burning both his tongue and his throat.

“Ah-ne-ca! How strong and brave it makes me feel!” he murmured, as he hurried away to the crest of a hill where he might get sight of the caribou.

But just here he met with a disappointment. The caribou herd he saw was small, not more than two or three hundred; the great herds were not yet passing.

Discouraged, disappointed, broken-hearted, he sat down upon the snow. His potion was gone, and with it had passed his great opportunity. He would never have courage to ask for more, and the power of this would be long spent before the passing of the great herds.

Then with new resolution he sprang to his feet.

“Ah-ne-ca!” he muttered. “A few are better than none.” And calling his dog with great confidence, he approached the caribou. But what was this? They had no more than gotten wind of him than they were away,

with clashing antlers and cracking heels. The magic potion had not worked!

Again the boy sank down upon the snow. All his grand dreams of power had vanished. But wait! His dog was barking somewhere far away. Perhaps all was not lost yet.

Hastening toward the place from which the sound came, he was met halfway by a very reluctant herd, driven by an enthusiastic yellow dog.

But such a herd as it was! Not thousands — not hundreds even — but twenty-four; that was all. Soolook laughed loud and long at sight of them.

Then, presently, his face sobered. Here at least he had something, — the beginning of a herd. In the spring there would be fawns. He would guard them well, and in time would become a wonder among his people.

One thing he marveled at and did not understand: of these twenty-four caribou, eight were brown, nine spotted and seven white. In this they resembled those five hundred in the herd over which Waste Warren watched.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VANISHING HERD

WASTE WARREN threw back his Arctic parka hood as he gained the crest of the ridge. Then, halting his reindeer, he climbed out quickly from his place on the sled. For a moment he stood gazing down at a narrow gully where a bunch of willows still waved their clinging dead leaves in defiance of winter's fiercest blast.

His brow wrinkled. His eyes were fixed on a small tent which stood out white in the midst of the willows. Then, putting finger to lips, he sent out a shrill whistle echoing down the ravine.

No answer came back. No head appeared at the opening of the tent flap.

His brow more wrinkled than before, he cupped his hands and shouted, "Allockeok! Oh, Allockeok!"

Again no answer. For a time he stood there on the hill crest and allowed the events of the past month to run through his mind. Six days after the departure of Soolook, Allockeok, a civilized Eskimo, had arrived for the reindeer herds from Alaska. With three sled deer, with supplies of food, a camp kit and two collie dogs, he had come prepared to assist in the task of bringing home the vagrant herd. "But," he had explained to Waste, "we must not start at once. There are rapid rivers not yet frozen over. Too much reindeer must be drowned if we start now."

So Waste had settled down with him to the herder's life in a tent.

Two days before he had gone on a caribou hunt, leaving the herd in Allockeok's care. Allockeok had promised to be at the tent when he returned. Evidently he was not there. The fact that the time for his return from bringing in the herd was long past worried Waste. The Eskimo and the herd seemed to have vanished.

Hastening down the hill, Waste threw back the tent flaps. A meal, cooked but not tasted,

stood on the camp table. The tea was already frozen over.

Pausing only long enough to gather up a supply of cold meat and a box of tea, the boy returned to his sled. He quickly stowed this food supply on the sled. Then, untying his deer, he resumed his seat, and slapping his reindeer, went spinning away down the ravine in search of a broad, hard-beaten trail, which would tell that a reindeer herd had passed that way.

That he was not long in finding, for the herd, in its very evident stampede, had crossed that ravine.

And, yes, as his sharp eyes studied the trail, he saw clearly marked the tracks of wolves and a sled. The sled was that of Allockeok. But the round, soft-padded tracks were made by wolves stampeding the herd. The herd had vanished. He must find it.

The three-hour Arctic day closed with a lingering twilight. Then the moon began rolling its red way across the hill-tops. Still the boy followed the broad trampled trail of the herd. Once his heart leaped high with

hope as, upon reaching the summit of a hill, he saw away in the distance a broad patch of brown, — an island of color in an ocean of white, it needs must be the herd, — or so he thought. But upon coming nearer, he found it to be only a bunch of scrub willows growing on the shore of a frozen lake. Again he seemed to hear the crack-crack and faint clash of antlers far away. But this too proved to be a delusion; the cracking sound was due, doubtless, to the electricity playing across the crisp, frozen air.

And now, on a promontory, looking away at broad stretches of tundra where nothing obstructed his view, his eye followed the trail until it narrowed to a mere ribbon, to disappear at last just before a towering mountain whose peak smoked like a volcano with the snow blown over it.

The crossing of broad stretches of tundra was uneventful. So accustomed had his reindeer become to following the broad trail they now did so with no guiding. Seeing this, he allowed himself the luxury of a few moments of sleep. Sitting there erect, his

head drooping, he might have seemed a frozen statue.

It was after one of these sleeps, of what duration he could not tell, that he awoke with a start. Rubbing his eyes, he stared about him. The sled was at a standstill. The reindeer was not pawing the snow for moss. It stood there patiently, as if expecting a guiding twitch of the reins. To his right lay the steep slope of the great mountain. On all other sides there still stretched the endless tundra.

Speaking cheerfully to his sled deer, he slapped him on the thigh. The beast moved some four sled-lengths, then paused again.

And now, with a start the boy realized that they were completely off the broad trail of the herd. The wind-packed snow about him was void of hoof-prints, save those of his own reindeer.

"Oh, well," he said cheerfully, tumbling off his sled and pulling at the rein to turn his deer about, "we 'll soon be with it again."

He had retraced the trail of his own deer for perhaps a hundred yards when he stopped

in amazement. He had, indeed, come upon the broad trail of the herd once more, but instead of swerving to right or left, as he had expected it to do it had vanished completely. There it was some fifty yards wide, hard-tramped and plain to see, and there at the base of a gently sloping incline it ended, — ended abruptly, with no trace of its onward marchings. It was as if the deer had suddenly taken wing, like a covey of ptarmigan, and flown away. As the boy closed his eyes, he had visions of five hundred reindeer hitched to sleds, flying through the air with long-bearded, fur-clad men at the helm.

“Santa Clauses,” he murmured, and smiled.

Then he shook himself. This was no time for dreaming. The herd had vanished — completely — and they had left no trace of their further wanderings. More than that, Allockeok had vanished with them. Yes, there were the marks of his sled still plainly to be seen smoothing its way across the trampled trail till it ended where the broad trail ended, at the foot of the gentle slope.

In a daze he stared about him. Tracing

and retracing his steps here and there, he found no clue. Then, because there was nothing that seemed more worth-while to do, he turned his reindeer toward a spot down the valley where a small forest of scrub-spruce trees lined the banks of a stream. There is companionship and comfort to be had from trees, and the boy felt strangely in need of both.

The sight of a cabin not far from the entrance to the scrub forest warmed his heart. He had not hoped to find warmth and shelter in such an out-of-the-way place. Yet, here it was — a sturdy log cabin — and back of it, tier upon tier, was a wood pile.

“Some old sour-dough miner,” the boy whispered to himself.

But, as he rounded the corner of the house, his hopes sank; the door stood half ajar; the threshold was buried with fine-sifted snow.

“Well, it’s a shelter, anyway,” he said, dropping from the sled and leading his reindeer forward.

He looked within. The place was a scene of wild confusion. Chairs were overturned;

a table reposing in the fireplace had one leg half burned away; sacks of salt, boxes of pepper, quantities of beans were strewn about the floor.

Stepping inside, he examined spots on the floor. Beyond a doubt they had been splotches of blood.

With a chill creeping up his spine, he sought again the open air. He tied his reindeer and walked aimlessly around and around the cabin. Then, suddenly, his foot struck some object half-buried in the snow.

Digging gingerly away at the snow, he presently uncovered the face of an aged miner. Bruised, cut and blood-stained as it was, he was able still to recognize the face of one of those cheerful, harmless old men who came to the Arctic in their prime, "in '93", to make a fortune in gold, and who, being "too much the loser to go outside", had lingered there year after year, still searching for the illusive "color."

"I wonder who has done this," Waste said to himself.

As he searched the body, the answer came.

A trifling leather ornament, such as is worn only by the Indians of the Land of Little Sticks, still clung to a button on the miner's trousers. It had doubtless been torn from an Indian's garment as they struggled.

The lad hurried back to the cabin and made a careful examination. There could be little doubt but this ravage had been committed by Indians. The articles they had carried away told the story. And, very soon, at the edge of the woods, he found their single file track where it crossed a bank of soft snow.

"Twenty or more," he mumbled to himself. "They're a bad lot, these Indians of the Farthest North."

Turning his reindeer away from this lugubrious spot, and from the scrub forest whose murmuring branches no longer spoke to him in tones of companionship, he hurried over his back trail, and began skirting the mountain. Whether his friend-herder and the herd had truly vanished from the earth he must know.

For an hour he jogged along over the ribbed banks of snow. Then suddenly he leaped

from his sled. He had come upon a trail. Not the broad trail of the herd, but the narrow trail of the Indians. The trail took the curve which he intended to follow.

Throwing a cartridge into the barrel of his rifle, he trotted beside his sled with eyes scanning the horizon. He had not traveled far, however, when he found the trail here and there disappearing. Again he stopped his deer and examined the snow closely. In a second he straightened up with a start to gaze away at the surface of the mountain. A great understanding was coming to him, and with it a great new fear.

He seized his reins and lashed the reindeer into a run. Now and again, as he ran beside him, he cast an apprehensive glance at the towering mountain of snow. A strange, new peril threatened him.

The fear which gripped his heart, as he lashed his reindeer into a run, was no unnamed peril of the mountain. It was something very real indeed. The summit of this gigantic mountain range, as it seemed to smoke from the drifting snow, had always interested

him, and once, with dog-sled and pack, he had fought his way almost to the top of one of these peaks. So near the summit had he come that the strange snow formation had been clearly and startlingly visible to him. The snow, drifting day after day, week in and month out, had been driven over the crest and packed hard, until now it was so curved over that it seemed the fore part of a great white toboggan. And a giant toboggan it was, too, for this bent portion could not have been less than three hundred feet from point to point.

And just at this juncture, as he had struggled upward for a better view, he had witnessed a wonderful and terrible phenomenon. Loosened by some flaw in its own formation, shaken by some gust of wind, disturbed by who knows what force, a great mass of snow from this toppling crest had plunged a thousand feet below, to crumble into bits and go plowing on and on toward the base of the mountain, bearing with it thousands of tons of snow, fine as granulated sugar, to bury a score of feet any object that chanced to be in its path.

It had been such an avalanche as this that had buried the broad trail of the herd. The fine-sifting snow told that story. What Waste now feared was a second avalanche. Had the first one buried the herd and Allockeok? This he must know before leaving the vicinity of the mountain. But first, for his own safety, he must put a greater distance between himself and the peak.

When he had gone a safe distance, having traveled far with little food and no rest, he had about decided to tether his reindeer over some rich moss bed and snatch two hours of sleep, when a cry of joy escaped his lips. He had come once more upon the trail of his herd. On all sides of him were the hoof-prints of reindeer. And, had there been any doubt left in his mind, there, plainly marking its way over the rougher trail, was the track of Allockeok's sled: the avalanche had come down after the herd had passed. Only one thing troubled Waste now. The Indians had come upon this trail also and had read the signs of the passing herd. They had followed the trail.

His fear for Allockeok's safety in this new crisis led the boy to shake from him the drowsiness which threatened to overpower him and to urge the hungry reindeer onward. He had not gone far when a new puzzle presented itself: a narrower trail, yet surely made by caribou or reindeer, joined the broader trail at an acute angle. And what was still more strange, a sled track followed this small herd, just as Allockeok's followed the larger herd.

"Some native hunting caribou," was his mental comment.

Yet this conclusion was not wholly satisfactory. The caribou or reindeer, whichever they might be, did not travel as if pursued. And the sled? How was it drawn? Certainly not by dogs, for there were no fresh dog tracks save one, and this did not follow the course of the sled. What was the answer? Had a smaller reindeer herd escaped and gone on a stampede, as the larger one had? And was it being pursued, as was the other, by a native? It would be strange, indeed, if two herds pursued by herders should cross trails in this desolate land. Then, too, the tracks

made by the runners of the stranger's sled were narrower and closer together than those of any reindeer sled he had ever seen.

The small herd followed in the tracks of the larger one for some distance, but in time, by an apparent urging on the part of the stranger and his dog, they had taken an acute angle, and their trail disappeared up a ravine.

"Strange old world!" said Waste, stroking his chin. "That fellow now might be of great assistance to us and we to him, provided — well, now — tell me is he friend or foe?"

CHAPTER XV

“CARIBOU”

WASTE now found himself at the base of a ridge. A steep and slippery ascent lay before him, but since the herd had chosen to go that way, he must follow. Twitching his reins, first this way, then that, to force his sled deer into a zigzag trail, he made his way upward until he stood upon the very crest and was able to see miles in all directions. His eyes at once sought the broad trail, and to his joy he saw on a tundra the herd he had been seeking. They were quietly feeding. If wolves had stampeded them in the beginning, these had apparently long since given up the chase.

But Allockeok, the Eskimo herder, and the Indians? Where were they?

Instantly his eyes sought some nearer levels. And with the first glance, his blood

ran cold. There, still plodding forward, half-asleep no doubt from his long hours of exhaustive travel, was Allockeok, and on the ridge behind him was a solitary Indian. The Indian was at this very moment lying on his stomach in the snow, taking careful aim at the plodding herder.

In his excitement Waste uttered a cry of warning. Then, realizing the futility of a shout when two miles or more intervened, he started forward as if to go to the rescue of his friend. But this also would be folly. Hidden in some ravine, perhaps even in ambush waiting for him, were the other Indians. He could do nothing. He must wait.

The Indian, seeming not to be satisfied with his position, lowered his rifle and moved farther up the hill. He then took steady aim once more. But a Providence, unseen but certain, appeared to be watching over the Eskimo boy, for this time a deep cut in the ridge over which he traveled hastily cut him out of view of the Indian. And, by the time he had crossed the cut, he was below the higher ridge and quite out of sight. If the Indian

was again to get into position to shoot, he must cross a broad hollow and climb to the top of the ridge which the Eskimo boy had just left.

With a sigh of relief, Waste sank down upon his sled. His limbs would no longer support him. Long hours of fatiguing travel without food or sleep had done its worst, and this last nervous strain had completed it. He must have rest. Without this, he could be of no service to his brave young companion, the Eskimo herder. Come what might, he would sleep.

Turning his reindeer down the ridge toward a point where a clump of willows waved their dead leaves in the wind, he walked ahead as if in a stupor. When presently the reindeer paused and began cropping the leaves, he staggered from his sled, and, tying the deer, crept beneath the canvas cover and immediately fell fast asleep.

And during all this time, on a rocky promontory, somewhat higher up the ridge, there had stood a solitary figure. It was Soolook, who had followed the smaller herd, which had some time before crossed the broader trail.

His small herd was to be seen in a narrow ravine at the head of the hill. It was presided over by the collie dog. The boy had been watching for some time; had seen the little drama of the Indian and the Eskimo herder, Allockeok. Had any one come close to him, he would have realized that Soolook was puzzled. He knew where the Indians were in ambush. He had seen the great herd of reindeer; had even followed it. But now he was at a loss to know what he might do for his friend, Waste.

He had seen Waste move back to the clump of willow bushes, so, having moved his copper-pointed spear to a position of advantage at his side, and having looked to the arrows in his quiver, he made his way cautiously down the ridge toward the clump of willows where Waste slept.

With the quick, gliding stride of his people, he covered the distance in an incredibly short time and was soon peering through the bushes. At first he approached the reindeer, but when the creature snorted he dropped quickly behind a short willow shrub.

When he saw that the sleeper had not been aroused, he crept closer and, rising on tiptoes, stared at the sleeping boy and his sled. His mind was in a turmoil. Should he join this sleeper, or should he fight alone when the time came? He was accustomed to doing things alone. He decided on that course now.

He had gained the hill crest once more, when suddenly his hands went up in a gesture of astonishment. And well they might, for his herd had vanished.

It was at this time that Allockeok, the Eskimo herder from the land of the white man, first caught sight of this wild boy from the land of the Far North and the Coppermine River. Allockeok was lying at the top of a ridge. He was concealed from view, partly by a growth of "mukluk" grass and partly by a snow barricade he had erected. He had caught sight of the Indian just as he reached the last ridge, and he had dropped to the snow just as the Indian's well-aimed rifle ball came singing over. Grasping a sled-rail, the Eskimo had allowed himself to be dragged down the slope. When well out of range, he had

quickly tied his reindeer to the sled, unroped his rifle, and crept back to the crest under protection of the “mukluk” grass.

But the Indian evidently realized that he had been discovered. He had disappeared and was probably in ambush behind the next hill.

Allockeok was puzzled and angered. He had always lived under white men’s laws, and knew very little of the ways of this far Northland. Only rumors of the cruelties of these Indians from the Land of Little Sticks had come to him. Now, while he wondered that they should be cruel enough to ambush him for the purpose of driving away his herd for slaughter later, when the forests were full of caribou, he still felt rising in his breast a strong resolve to play the game cautiously and sell his life dearly in protecting the rich herd which had been intrusted to his care.

He had no doubt but that there were more Indians about; that they might at this very moment be skulking around to outflank him.

It was while scanning the hills for these

probable enemies that he caught sight of the lone wild boy of his own race. He could not know that the boy was from another land, but he did know at once that he was an Eskimo: his garments and manner of walking told him that; and being an Eskimo, he was a friend. Allockeok's heart warmed at thought of that. He had not yet caught sight of his friend, Waste, who followed on his trail, but now he did not feel so terribly alone.

Now and again he glanced behind him where the herd of five hundred reindeer were feeding. He had hoped by this time to be resting near them, while his dogs kept them from further wanderings. But conditions had changed. Since the Indian was not in sight, he began watching the movements of the young Eskimo from the wild country, as he climbed the higher ridges. He wondered if the Indians had seen him; if he was in peril; if he should fire a shot to warn him.

This boy seemed to be scanning the hills this way and that, as if looking for something. Could it be that he had sighted the Indians and was looking for them?

No, a second's glance down at the tundra gave him the answer. A small herd of reindeer, foreign to his own herd, were cracking their heels down the hill to join his larger herd. Reason told him that this herd belonged to the strange Eskimo; that having scented the larger herd, they had stampeded toward them.

One deer in this herd stood out as a leader. He was two hands taller than any of his mates, and his antlers branched like the top of a tree. He had the height of a caribou, but the broadness and strength of a reindeer. Allockeok gazed at him in admiration. Never in all his life as a herder had he seen such a wonderful creature.

“Half-reindeer, half-caribou,” he murmured.

But at that moment his eye was caught by the strange actions of the Eskimo. He was standing on the ridge. With hands raised in a gesture of despair, he was gazing away at the herds which appeared to be about to join.

This gesture of despair puzzled Allockeok.

There was nothing so terrible about the joining of a small herd with a larger one. All reindeer were carefully marked. The building of a brush corral and cutting out of the visitor's reindeer would take but two days of pleasant toil; or the smaller herd might remain for an indefinite time with the larger one; the ownership would not be changed.

As he saw the gesture a question entered his mind. Could this Eskimo be from some band other than his own, where laws were different? The thought affected him strangely.

Then he saw the Eskimo turn and gaze intently behind him. The object which had attracted his attention was hid from Alloc-keok's view by the hill, but as he looked and listened, he caught a faint sound like the rush of a distant waterfall.

"Caribou!" he murmured. "Many, many caribou!"

CHAPTER XVI

A STRANGE BATTLE

WHEN Waste awoke after an hour of sleep that had been intense as unconscious stupor, he found the dizzy sickness gone. He felt now able to travel and thought at once of his herder, Allockeok.

After a hasty lunch of hard-tack and frozen venison, he harnessed his reindeer. But at this juncture he paused to debate the same problem which had perplexed the wild Eskimo boy, and he finally came to the same conclusion: it was better to climb to the peak of a high foothill and try to discover from that vantage point the position of the Indians, the reindeer herd and Allockeok.

He had not gone a dozen steps in that direction when something casting back the moonlight with a golden glow attracted his attention. It was one of the Eskimo boy's arrows.

Instantly he recognized it as coming from the wild tribe which he had visited.

Tucking the copper-pointed arrow beneath the canvas of his sled, he went on with a lighter heart. If a tribe of these people was near, he felt sure that they might be counted on as his allies.

The hill he chanced to climb was the highest one of the region. Hardly had he mounted it than he sighted the Eskimo boy. Standing on another hill, the boy was shading his eyes and gazing away in the direction from which they had come. In wonder, Waste gazed with him, and with increasing wonder he continued to gaze. Down through the narrow valley appeared to be pouring a liquid stream of brown. And now the sound came to him, — a sound as of a rushing waterfall. But he was no more deceived than the wild boy had been. This, he told himself, was a multitudinous host of caribou. They were returning from the barren-ground, summer pastures to the willow-grown, moss-covered valley of the upper Yukon.

But quickly Waste's mind was called back

to the business at hand. The reindeer herd! Was it still on the tundra? And if it were, would the passing herd of caribou swallow it up and bear it along; or would there be a pitched battle between herds? Allockeok, his herder, — where was he?

It was a strange sight which met his eyes as he turned to look in the other direction. Two miles or so in the distance the reindeer herd was still quietly feeding. But in the foreground, as if enacting a moving-picture drama, were a score or more of Indians and one Eskimo boy, Allockeok.

Allockeok was still lying in ambush waiting for the Indians. The single Indian, also in ambush, still camped on his trail; while to the right, apparently stalking the reindeer herd, was the main body of the Indian band.

And now Allockeok, the herder, lifted his head to listen. Now he, for the first time, saw his friend, Waste. He waved a signal of joy. But he had heard, too, the clash of the antlered host of caribou. The single Indian also had heard, for he turned half

about to listen. Then the band of Indians heard and paused, as if undecided. So they all stood waiting in the moonlight, — Soolook, Allockeok, Waste, the single Indian and the Indian band.

Waste dropped upon the snow and leveled his rifle. The single Indian had not seen him, was well within the range of his powerful rifle. The boy's finger was on the trigger; the bead was over the Indian's heart. He was a villain, well deserved to die; the scene at the aged miner's cabin had told that. Yet Waste had never killed a fellow man; he could not do it now. So, still covering the man that he might protect Allockeok, he waited the next move in this strange drama.

As the great herd of caribou came rushing on, the Indian band appeared to change their plans of operation. Sneaking back to some low ridges of snow, which would hide them from the caribou, they dropped down and lay there motionless. The caribou would pass close to them. The smash of bullets from high-power rifles at that distance must wreak great havoc among the dense masses. Waste

hoped that they might be satisfied with their killings from the wild herd.

But even when the vanguard came opposite them, the Indians did not fire, but appeared to watch for the outcome of the meeting of the wild herd with the tame.

“Perhaps they have dreams of capturing the reindeer and turning herders,” thought Waste.

Now and then as he watched them he detected in the actions of the reindeer signs of disturbance. Now one shook his antlers and sprang to his feet; now another, and another. And now they left off feeding to turn about and face in the direction of the caribou hosts.

Questions flashed through his mind. Quite forgetting the Indians, Waste thought of the reindeer alone. Would they stand and await the arrival of the great herd? Would they then quietly join it, swelling the mass, as the waters of a creek swell the body of a river? Or would they stampede? Would there be a fight?

“If they should stampede,” he whispered. “If they only would!”

And now the critical moment had arrived. The vanguard of the mammoth herd, a hundred stalwart bulls, with wide-spreading antlers and heavy shoulders, had come within sight of the reindeer. They were yet half a mile away, but he thought he detected a slackening of their pace. And, yes, there came the clash of antler on antler, as the caribou crowded upon one another. It was like a vast army when the command "Halt!" had been passed down the line.

At last the whole herd stood at attention, while the hundred or more of the great bulls pawed the snow, shook their antlers and bellowed a challenge.

"It's a fight," he murmured.

But now a strange thing happened. Perhaps it had never happened before, — may never happen again. Perhaps it happens many times each year in the barren lands where no human eye is witness.

A great bull, half a hand taller than any of his companions, stepped majestically out from the caribou hosts. Still bellowing his challenge, he stood there, a splendid object

in the moonlight. And from the little band beyond there almost instantly appeared another champion.

As he stepped forth, bellowing an answering challenge, Waste caught his breath. Not from the five hundred came this champion, but from Soolook's little herd of twenty-four, which had so recently joined them. This was a prize bull, the strongest, the best.

He was five years old, was this buck, — just in his prime. Waste's heart swelled with hope at sight of this champion. His breath came short and quick, as the animal moved forward to battle. Through his mind ran stories he had read of David and Goliath, and of Sohrab and Rustum in the fog of the Oxus Stream.

There was no mad rushing on as these champions approached each other. There were haltings and many bellows. When, at last, they stood with heads lowered for battle, their antlers seemed merely to touch and part again like crossing of swords. Many a pair of splendid bucks have been found with antlers locked in the clamp of death. Per-

haps these wise ones had at one time or another barely escaped such a death. At any rate, they stood there for a second. Then the bull caribou, being more alert, stepped to one side and lunged at the half-reindeer's flank. The blow was easily side-stepped and a counter-blow executed, from which the other narrowly escaped.

There followed more pawing and bellowing. The clash of antlers from the herds echoing down the valleys seemed applause for each champion.

Then the half-reindeer plunged with little effect. But the countercharge caught him in the thigh and sent him limping backward. The first blood had been drawn.

But this, in no way affrighting the active bull, seemed only to give him shrewdness and prowess. Time after time the other charged. Time after time the reindeer side-stepped without offering a counter-thrust.

Waste watched with open-mouthed wonder, yet not without a thought for other things. How was this all to end? Casting an eye now and then toward the wild Eskimo boy,

he saw him do strange things. Once he tested the hard-packed snow with his spear, then adjusted a pair of ski to his feet. And once he tightened a strap. Then again he arranged his arrows in their quiver and grasped his short copper-pointed spear.

But now the moment arrived when the half-reindeer would try his own powers. Once, twice, three times in mad, whirling succession, he charged the flanks of the half-exhausted caribou. And the third blow found its mark. With a roar of defiance and anguish the wild champion went down.

But now he was up again and charging wildly. Three more charges, and he was down again.

Waste, casting a glance in the direction of Soolook, saw him standing upon his ski. Balancing himself with his copper spear, he seemed about to enter the combat.

“What wild action of his does he think will save the day for our herd?” Waste thought.

But at that moment a sound smote his ear which sent the cold chills shooting up his spine. Was it the cry of wild beast or wild

man? Turning to look in the direction from whence it came, he saw innumerable gray streaks dashing across the hill.

“Wolves!” he exclaimed.

In a second all was changed. A great pack of white timber wolves, having heard the clatter of hoof and antler, had hurried over the hills to prey upon the caribou.

Suddenly, out of the stillness which followed the one prolonged howl, a rifle cracked. An Indian had fired a shot; whether at wolf or caribou, or at the wild Eskimo, who could now be seen flying down the hill on the wings of the wind, Waste could not tell. But however that might be, it was a fatal shot for the Indians, for at once they were surrounded and attacked by the hunger-maddened wolf-pack. It was apparent that they had been taken completely by surprise. At close range they were no match for the terrible fangs. One by one they went down.

Turning his eyes from the gruesome scene, Waste turned once more toward the herds and their champions.

The fallen caribou had regained his footing.

Again he attacked. But this time it was with the blind fury of defeat. He charged straight on and, before his antagonist could swerve to right or left, drove his antlers with such force into the other's horny mass that the two were wedged inseparably together, and both, bellowing and pawing, now with hoofs high in air and now tearing at snow and moss, rolled upon the ground.

Meanwhile, the rattle of a thousand antlers grew more clamorous. Evidently the herd was preparing to again set itself in motion.

Whether the wild Eskimo boy had anticipated all this Waste could not tell; but one thing was sure, he was on the spot at almost the instant the caribou made his last mad thrust. And, as they fell, tumbling and pawing, watching every opening, he thrust out with his spear.

When presently the caribou lay motionless, a few neat blows on the antlers freed his prize and sent him back to his herd in triumph.

Then it was that the wild boy, with his collie yelping by his side, went through a

set of wild leaps and gyrations such as are known only to the Eskimo; went through them too with such energy that they sent the reindeer herd crashing over the hills in one direction and the caribou hosts in the other.

Seeing this, both Allockeok and Waste, lashing their deer into motion, went shooting along in the trail of the wild boy and their herd, leaving the few remaining Indians to make the best of a bad piece of business, and the caribou to disappear in the distance.

Three hours later they came up with the herd, which had settled down again to feeding. Waste was not surprised to find that the wild boy who watched them was no other than his old friend Soolook. His actions had half told him that.

And now, at last, Soolook was face to face with the mysterious stranger with a means of communicating his thoughts to him; for it took him no time at all to learn that Allockeok could speak not only the Eskimo language but that of the pale-faced stranger as well.

He refused to drink the coffee which Waste now prepared, still believing it to be a magic

potion. But, as the others ate and drank, he asked questions of Waste. And Waste, being wise in the ways of the wild people and knowing their limited powers of understanding, did not tell him that coffee was not a magic potion; that gold disks were money; that the terrible creature with the screeching voice and glowing eye was only an engine running on the track, and not the Kabluna at all. He did tell him that he, himself, was a Kabluna; that Kabluna meant the same as Alongmeet, which, in turn, meant white man. He also told him that they did kill at a distance with a magic of great noise, as he himself had seen, and that they did many other wonderful things. But, as for size, he himself was as large as most of his race, and when it came to eyes, all his people had two of them, except when an accident put one of them out. He did say, "Leave your little herd with ours. It will still belong to you; and come with us. We will show you many strange things. We will show you that which kills the minute you touch it. We will show you that which could crush ten men and still move on its way. And

we will show you how, in the midst of all these wonders, our people live in safety because all these monsters do our bidding.”

And Soolook said :

“It is a wonderful magic. I will go.”





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